

A SPLENDID SERIAL STORY COMMENCES IN THIS NUMBER.

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VIOLET IS RELUCTANTLY COMPELLED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CAPTAIN MARSTON'S HELP.

THE LOST STAR.

—101—

CHAPTER I.

In the midst of a bustling, excited crowd at Paddington Station, jostled by porters, nearly knocked down by luggage-trucks, entirely overlooked by eager, elderly females intent upon the safe portage of innumerable small packages, stared at by sundry members of the "crutch and toothpick brigade," who seemed to have nothing to do but to ogle and yawn, stood one lonely unit, with a pale, sorrowful face, and large, wistful eyes, waiting with large-minded patience till guard or porter should open the door of a second-class carriage.

Ruby St. Hellers stretched out a small hand for the fiftieth time, and tried in vain to move the inexorable brass handle. Not half-an-inch would it budge, and she was obliged to relinquish it once more, with a small uncomplaining sigh.

"Allow me," said a deep, musical voice, and a young man in an ulster leant forward, twisted the handle round with the utmost ease, and threw open the door.

She thanked him with a slight bend of her graceful neck, casting a timid glance of gratitude at his handsome face as she took her seat in the corner of the carriage. He raised his hat, and stepped back with a frown to make room for two fast-looking men.

"There she is," said one, with ferocious moustaches and whiskers, "and uncommonly good-looking she is, by Jove! Shame that she should be all alone."

"We'll take compassion on her, poor little girl," drawled the other, as he stuck his eyeglass in his eye. "Beauty shan't be dull whilst we are on the spot."

A crimson blush dyed Ruby's modest cheeks, and she looked up with an involuntary appeal for help at the stranger who had already befriended her. He darted forward, threw in a large roll of rugs, and took the opposite seat to hers,

where the others found him securely-established, when they returned from a hasty search after railway literature.

The two men glanced at each other, but the two bullies soon slunk away when confronted with six-feet-two of muscular, masculine strength, and had barely time to scramble into a smoking-carriage when the train began to move out of the station.

With a deep breath of relief Ruby St. Hellers leant back in her corner, her hands clasped in her muff, her neat little bonnet resting against the dark blue curtain.

"I am not in your way, I hope," stooping his fair head over the rug, and contriving to adjust them in such a manner as to cover her knees as well as his own. "But," with a slight smile, "I thought my presence might be useful."

"It was most kind of you; but do not trouble yourself about me, please, I am quite warm," with a blushing attempt to discard the welcome wraps.

"You do not look so," and his eyes twinkled

mischievously, "but if they inconvenience you I will strap them up again."

"But they were brought for your use, not mine."

"I don't generally travel with half-a-dozen, but Howell seems to have known by inspiration that you had left yours behind."

"Not that," she said, gently, in her utter truthfulness, feeling obliged to disown the possession of the mythical rugs lest she should seem to deceive. "I had none to bring."

"Of course not" (as if her poverty were optional); "if you are in the habit of travelling alone, you must have quite enough to do to look after yourself without any encumbrances."

"This is the first time," she turned away and looked out of the window that he might not see the teardrops glistening in her eyes as she thought of the happy, prosperous past in contrast with the poverty-stricken present.

"And I hope it will be the last," he said, gravely, "for really it is neither safe nor pleasant for such as you."

"The last!" with a soft laugh. "Why, this is only the beginning, and I must go on doing it till the end."

"What end?"

"The only place where I shall ever be able to rest without counting my half-crowns," she rejoined, with a sudden burst of bitterness. "Please excuse me," as the colour rushed into her cheeks, "I ought not to talk like this to a stranger."

"But if we are strangers now," he returned, with a smile, "I hope to be friends before the evening is past. By the label on your bag I can see that we are going to the same place, so that you will have no excuse for cutting me when we get out."

"Are you Lord Chester's son?" her eyes wide open with surprise.

"I am. My name is Harold Jerningham."

"And Miss Ruby St. Hellers—your sister's governess."

Her head drooped, her voice sank, her long lashes swept her cheek—after years of wealth and luxury it is bitter to the young to confess that they have sunk from the ranks of "the worked for" to that of those who work.

"I am heartily glad to hear it," and his voice was so cordial that it cheered her at once.

"By what happy chance did my mother find you out?"

"Through an old friend of my father's. Oh! Mr. Jerningham," leaning forward in her eagerness, "do you think I shall do it?"

He looked down into the beautiful upturned face with a kindly smile. "I am sure you will—if you are not too good for it."

"Too good! How could I be! I should think a mother would want the best woman on earth to be always with her children."

"You are right. I was only thinking that it would be hard for yourself, if—hesitatingly, "you were accustomed to better things."

"All that I must forget."

"You are rather young to begin forgetting already. I think it is the hardest thing in life," with an impatient sigh.

"Then you must have tried."

His large eyes looked vaguely out at the darkening landscape. Had he succeeded? No—and never would. Pahaw! it was useless to think of it. With a shrug of his shoulders he leant back, pulling at the tips of his moustache. This little girl with the pure high-bred face interested him strangely, and her pitiful position excited his compassion as he meditated rather sadly on fate that lay before her. The beauty which made her so infinitely pleasant to look at would be but a thorn in her flesh, and expose her to constant humiliations. His own sister Clem would be certain to be jealous of her; his eldest brother Alverley would pounce on her after his fashion, and incense his mother against her—his father would scarcely know that there was such a being in the house—the children might be fond of her, and they were his only hope.

Meanwhile he racked his brains to give Ruby a few hints which might be serviceable in the future; and when the train stopped at Alverley

he handed her out with as much deference, as if she had been of the blood royal.

"What has come for us?" he inquired of the footman, who could scarcely recover from his surprise at seeing his master step out of a second-class carriage.

"The brougham for you, sir, and the pony-carriage for the young lady," as he picked up the bundle of rugs, and led the way to the door of the station.

"How many boxes have you?" turning to Ruby, who was looking very white and nervous.

"Only two."

"That is capital! Tell George to look after Miss St. Hellers's luggage. It will be all right, you needn't wait for it," as he helped her into the brougham and shut the door.

At a sign from himself the carriage drove off, and he was left alone in the mud, lost in a brown study.

He was roused from it by George, the groom, who came up and touched his hat, implying that he was ready to start.

"What possessed Miller to send the pony-carriage instead of my own cart?" he asked discontentedly, as he took his place in the more effeminate vehicle, and gathered up the reins.

"Please, sir, it was my lady that sent the brougham for you, as she thought you would be cold in the dog-cart. The pony-trap was for the young lady," and George squeezed himself into the small seat behind.

"Ah!" murmured Harold to himself, as he drove through the dusky lanes, "I ought to have remembered that governesses are never allowed to be chaffed. Poor child! I should like to help her if I could; but, hang it all, if I speak to her a couple of times in the day all the woman-kind in the house will be up in arms, and swear that I am in love with her. I must be absurdly careful; and then she will think I'm a brute. Hermit goes better in harness than I thought," this to the groom.

A conversation ensued about that unending topic of interest—horses; and before it was concluded the pony-carriage dashed up to the gates of Chester Chase, as a brougham retired slowly to the stable-yard.

Harold cast an eager glance round as he entered the hall, and walked quickly up to the fireplace, before which Ruby was standing.

"Why are you waiting here?"

"Someone has gone to ask if Lady Chester would like to see me," she said, shyly, all the fawning humiliation of her new position weighing on her young heart like a ton of lead.

"Of course she will. Come this way, and I will announce you."

Without waiting for her consent, he drew aside the crimson curtain over a doorway on the left, and in another minute Ruby found herself standing in a dimly-lighted room, which, with its lofty ceiling and well-filled bookcase, reminded her of her father's library at home—that home which she was never to see again.

In a cluster of light, before the wide fireplace, sat a group of people round a small table with gilt legs.

The firelight played on the Countess's Honiton lace cap and soft fair hair; on the Sevres china teacup she held in her hand; on Lady Clementine's sharp profile, as she bent forward, with the silver tongs between her slender fingers, offering an extra lump of sugar to a man with a dark, resolute face, who was sitting on such an extremely low chair that he seemed to be lounging on the tiger-skin mat at his feet.

The scene became imprinted as a long-remembered picture on Ruby's brain.

"Mother, here is Miss St. Hellers;" as the rich, full voice broke across the silence three heads looked round in surprise.

With a great rustling of silks and laces the Countess rose slowly from her seat. Clementina frowned and whispered something in her mother's ear, as she advanced with a courteous smile.

"I am very happy to make Miss St. Hellers's acquaintance," she said, graciously, as she shook hands; "but why did you bring her here? The children are anxiously expecting her in the school-room."

"She will have enough of them by-and-by."

Clem, you are not half as fat as you were in the summer," as he kissed his sister. "How do, Marston?"

At the name of Marston, Ruby raised her head, like a poor little stag at bay. Conscious of the presence of an enemy, she gathered all her forces together by a supreme effort, and determined that he should not find out any sign of weakness, returned Lady Clementina's cold greeting with a dignity equal to her own, and then turned, as if anxious to leave the room.

Captain Marston was not a man to be ignored.

After one startled look of inquiry at the pale proud face, which he had seen so often before under far different circumstances, he stepped quickly in front of her, with outstretched hand, "We are old friends, Miss St. Hellers."

"I believe we have met before," she said, with a chilling bow, intended to keep him at a distance both then and for ever afterwards.

Marston bit his lip with an angry frown.

Harold Jerningham glanced from one to the other with some curiosity, whilst Ruby, looking appealingly at Lady Chester, asked if she might be allowed to go to her room.

"Certainly; I will take you to the schoolroom myself. No doubt you are tired and cold, and a warm cup of tea will be very acceptable. Clementina, you are forgetting Harold; I dare say the poor boy is dying of thirst."

"That I am," he said, looking down at the teacup which his sister was hastily filling for him, as Lady Chester, followed by Ruby, left the room. "I suppose this sort of china is too good for a governess."

"How absurd you are, Harold," she exclaimed, pettishly. "Of course she will have tea with the children. Why on earth did you bring her in here?"

"I found her on the door-mat like unclaimed luggage, so I naturally picked her up, metaphorically, and brought her to my mother for identification. So you knew her before, Marston?"

"Yes, slightly. Any news in town?"

"Only that Bobby has bolted. They say it runs in the name."

"You don't mean it!" with an expression of dismay. "And what becomes of Mrs. B.?"

"She receives various forms of consolation from her friends. One sent her a pug-dog, another a tea-pot of some hideous china, supposed to be a gem."

"Poor thing, I think I will call and take her a box of chocolate."

"A capital substitute for a husband!" laughed Clementina, as she threw herself down in a chair, and took up some knitting.

"Anyone coming to dinner?" inquired Harold, as he leant against the exquisitely carved mantelpiece.

"Yes; just the kind of people you like best—heavy country squires, addicted to port and sport, and their placid, well-fed, ill-dressed wives, with no ideas above the peccadilloes of their lady-maids, or the flirtations of the village school-mistress. Ugh!"

"A lively look-out for us, Marston!"

"Oh, I'm all right. I trust your sister will have compassion upon me."

Clementina smiled. "And as for you, you can watch over your *protégée*."

"I don't know who she is"—very shortly.

"I thought you seemed inclined to make yourself Miss St. Hellers's champion."

"By no means. The next time I find any thing on the door-mat I shall leave it there, even if it's your best diamond necklace. Come along, Marston, and have a smoke."

CHAPTER II.

CHESTER CHASE was a massive, grey-stone building, with castellated, ivy-grown towers, and battlemented terraces which had suffered considerably from the cannon of the Ironsides, when Cromwell sat down before it with a handful of his almost invincible legions, and expected it to surrender to the terror of his name. The Royal standard was still floating from its topmost turret, when Prince Rupert, with his gallant

troopers, dashed into the midst of the enemy's camp, and the war-cry, "For God and the King!" resounded far and wide above the groans of the wounded and the clashing of steel against steel.

Although the Chase was saved from instant destruction, the Jerninghams suffered severely for their loyalty during the reign of the Protector. However, according to the French proverb, "Everything comes to him who knows how to wait;" and when the Stuarts were restored to their throne the head of the Jerninghams returned to his home with the patent of an earldom in his pocket.

The present Lord Chester was an elderly man, with a vast amount of pride, announced to the world in general by the haughty aquiline nose which adorned his thin, patrician face, a small, head-ling of brains, and an exterior veneer of politeness and amiability. Those who were unfortunate enough to excite his displeasure were apt to find that the outside polish was easily rubbed off, and the consequences were unpleasant when he wished to chastise.

Before Ruby St. Hellars left the home into which she had just been ushered, she was destined to rue the day that she had ever set foot within the Chase, or heard the name of Jerningham.

At present, happily unconscious of the fate that lay before her, she was attiring herself in a simple evening dress, preparatory to going into the drawing-room in obedience to Lady Chester's wish "for a little music."

She had been much pleased with her young pupils, the fair-haired little Lady Marian, and the grey-eyed Lady Beatrice; and the remembrance of their pretty, playful ways brought a smile to her sweet lips as she took a last look at her own reflection.

She was dressed very simply, in black, cut square at the shapely neck, but as she entered the drawing-room, with a roll of music in her hand, her head held high in proud reserve, her lips firmly set, her long lashes resting shyly on her colourless cheeks, there was something so noble in her bearing that even Lady Clementina could not look upon her with disdain.

Her heart was beating fast under her mask of composure, and she had to keep reminding herself pathetically that "it was all for Violet's sake," in order to bear up without a sign.

When she was once seated at the piano she lost her own identity in the music, which seemed to flow spontaneously from the tips of her fingers directly they came in contact with the notes.

Passionate waves of harmony were waking up the drowsy dowagers when the gentlemen came into the room.

Harold Jerningham, after one look at Ruby's back hair, threw himself down on a sofa by the side of Mrs. Upton, the rector's wife; whilst Captain Marston, who had taken up his position on the stronghold of the after-dinner Englishman—the hearth-rug—seeing that Lady Clementina was engrossed in an animated discussion about the last fashion in tea gowns, quietly made his way to the piano, and on pretext of turning over her pages, entered into a whispered conversation with his old friend, Miss St. Hellars.

"I wish you would tell me where Violet is?" he said, in a low voice, which no one but Ruby could hear.

"Why, in order that you might make her miserable?"

"In order that I might be happy. You don't know what it is to me to be without her."

"I know that it is better for you, and a thousand times better for her."

"How can you be so cruel? Ruby, you never had a heart."

She flashed an indignant glance at him over her shoulder, but said nothing, winding up the piece she was playing by a series of sonorous chords.

"Charming, my dear Miss St. Hellars; how beautifully you play!" exclaimed the Countess, in genuine admiration. "Could you favour us with a song? I think we were told that your voice was delightful."

Ruby coloured, looked out a song without any fuss, and sat down again. Captain Marston was

still by her side, when in a clear, rich soprano she began, "Je ne veux pas d'autre chose."

"If you would sing those words to me," he whispered in her ear, "I know I should wish for nothing else."

"Not even for Violet?" she asked, scornfully. As the song ended, her hands sank down in her lap.

"Not even for her. Why should I? You are exactly like her in face, and I always said you had the best temper. Will you meet me in the orchard-house to-morrow morning at twelve o'clock?"

"Voluntarily, I shall never meet you again," and she rose from her seat.

"You shall tell me where Violet is, or I will find her in spite of you."

"Do, if you can," with a contemptuous shrug of her graceful shoulders, although her heart seemed to grow cold within her breast.

"Ruby, if you defy me you will live to regret it."

"Then I shall have to live till I grow childlike."

"I shall do my best to find her. But if I fail you shall suffer, though I escape."

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, turning over some photographs which were lying on a table to hide her agitation, "don't I suffer enough now?"

He looked at her with sudden, passionate admiration in his eyes. "Yes, but not through me."

"It is so brave to hit a woman when she is down," her lip curling in utter scorn.

"The world would call it by another name."

"What do you mean?"

"That 'Mignon,' has not such depth of feeling in its music as the song you sang just now," he replied, coolly turning the conversation, as he saw Lady Clementina coming towards him.

In another minute he was bending over her, with lover-like solicitude, at the piano, whilst Harold Jerningham took his place by Ruby's side.

"You must be pleased to find an old friend among such a nest of strangers!"

"Indeed, I am not. You forget," with a weary smile, "that between me and my old friends there is as great a gulf fixed as between Dives and Lazarus—a gulf such as the world will never care to bridge."

"Then some of us will have to swim."

"No, few would care to try."

"Have you such a poor idea of human nature that you think friendship is governed by pounds, shillings, and pence?"

"I know that the world in general considers poverty the one unpardonable sin."

"I know so little of the world in general," he said, carelessly, "but I can answer for myself and all the fellows I like best."

"You are laughing at me; for you must know that this is my first experience of the world on my own account."

"This!" elevating his eyebrows, "why, Paddington Station would be a better illustration of it. At least there everyone was not out of the same pattern."

"No, if they had been I should not have required protection."

"And I should have had to travel by myself, Miss St. Hellars," lowering his voice, and bending forward, "would you object to telling me if you were ever intimate with Marston?"

"Yes," after a pause, "he was once engaged to my sister."

"And it was broken off?"

"Yes. I tell you this in confidence."

"It shall go no further."

"Do you think Lady Chester would excuse me? My head is aching frightfully."

"Why did you not say so before! You must imagine us to be worse than the Egyptian task-masters."

"I would not say it now if I could help it. Oh, Mr. Jerningham, do you think there is any truth in presentiments?" as she raised her eyes to his in anxious inquiry.

He was thinking how beautiful they were—an exquisite tawny brown, with darker lashes, nearly

an inch long, whilst she was waiting for an answer.

"Why! Are you suffering from one to-night?" he said, at last. "Ah! Mr. Upton," as the rector sauntered up to the table by which they were standing, "we want your authority upon a very serious subject. Miss St. Hellars wishes to know if there is any truth in presentiments!"

The old gentleman bowed courteously.

"If the young lady will sit down, and allow me to do the same, we will discuss the subject at our ease."

Ruby subsided on to an ottoman, the rector placed himself beside her, with one arm leaning on the back, and Harold took a chair.

"By presentiment I presume you mean a feeling of depression presently to be followed by the shock of some misfortune. As the mercury sinks lower and lower in a weather-glass to give notice of a coming storm, I believe that Heaven graciously permits us to feel this prevision of evil, in order that we may be better prepared to meet it when it comes. But there, I see my wife is moving, so poor Peter will not be left any longer to shiver in the cold." He rose, and held out his hand. "I am very glad to have met you," with a cordial smile; "and I hope before long, if you are not afraid of being bored by a tiresome old couple, you will find your way down to the Rectory. Good evening."

Ruby gratefully assented, and when she went to bed that night she felt that if trouble came she had secured one friend at least to stand by her side in "that nest of strangers," and the thought brought some comfort to her desolate heart.

Harold Jerningham, although she knew by one glance at his face that he was honest, and kind, and true, she felt she must never appeal to. There was such pleasure in the thought of his chivalric friendship that she feared to taste it, fastidiously telling her that on this earth of ours the darkest depths are those which are crowned with the sweetest flowers.

CHAPTER III.

"Now, May, you positively must not run any more, or you will make yourself ill," and trying to look very determined, Ruby caught hold of her refractory pupil, whose cheeks were glowing like a rose, and held her fast.

"But please, Miss Sellars," for her young lips could not manage the rather peculiar name, "I'll run very slowly next time if Bee will promise not to catch me."

"Just you run, and see if I don't come after you," and Lady Beatrice, her bright eyes twinkling, stretched out one of her sturdy little legs as far as she could reach, in order to intimate that she was ready to start.

Ruby pulled out her watch, and exclaimed in dismay,—

"Half-past twelve already, we shall never be at home in time for luncheon!"

"Dinner at one, we are late; what fun!" cried May in a fit of poetic inspiration, "and instead of me not running any more," she added in glee, "we must all take hands, and race home as fast as we can pelt."

"You must not say pelt; and it is 'my' not running, and not 'me,'" corrected Ruby, conscientiously.

"I thought there was no time to think about grammar, or of course I know it very well; but now let us have a grand race, right up to the house. One—two—three!"

"Stop!" said Bee, authoritatively. "Miss Sellars doesn't want to run—grown-up people never do. If we go home by the wood, we shall get there in lots of time. Now don't make a fuss, Miss Fidget"—to her small sister—"or I shall tell everybody that you are afraid of rabbits!"

Having allayed her objections by this awful threat, and telling Ruby that she knew the way as well as the first half of her catechism, Bee clambered over a gate, and waited for the others to follow. Ruby was dreadfully afraid of stick-

ing at the top, but after a resolute climb on the one side, and an irresolute slip on the other, she found herself so far safe that she was standing on *terra firma* in the midst of a bramble bush.

"Look out for the prickles," cried May, considerably, and ran after her sister at the top of her speed.

Ruby got out of "the prickles" as soon as she could, with a torn skirt, and a thorn in her finger, and hurried after her little charges, whose voices she could hear at a little distance.

It was a fine morning, and everything was glistening with drops of dew, but she had no time to notice the beauties of the wood, the varied forms of the trees, the red berries glistening here and there in a stray sunbeam, the birds fluttering from spray to spray, chirruping cheerfully in the gladness of heart that knows no sin. Every now and then she nearly tumbled on her nose, or caught her dress on a briar, and the children received her with a shout of laughter when she stopped short on the bank of a small stream, with an expression of comic perplexity on her pretty face.

"What shall we do?" she exclaimed in real distress, for the countess was extremely particular about punctuality, and time was running short.

"Let us pull off our shoes and stockings and pretend we are wrecked on a desert island, then we shall get to the other side, and feel so glad we are safe," suggested Beatrice, sitting down on a very damp fern, in order to begin operations at once.

"Get up directly, or you will catch your death of cold."

"But what are we to do? Mamma will be very angry if we are late."

"We must go round by the road."

May clapped her hands.

"I like the road ever so much the best."

"Cos you are so afraid of rabbits."

"I'm not, but you are afraid of cows."

"I don't like their horns, but that's different."

"Can't I be of any service to you?"

A sudden rush of colour came into Ruby's face as she looked up to see the only man whom she feared in the world advancing towards her over the clumps of withered ferns.

"If you can make the brook wider, not without," she answered, coldly.

"At least I can make it possible to cross it. Come, which of you little ones shall I carry over first?"

"Me," and both of them sprang into his arms, thinking it the greatest joke possible.

"Get upon my back then, one of you, at once. Put your arms round my neck. There, that's it. Steady, and over we go."

Beatrice screamed with delight as he waded quickly across the stream, the water not coming up to the tops of his high shooting-boots. Marian was quite ready to follow her example, and when she was placed in safety on the other bank he came back to the place where Ruby was standing, his dark face flushed and eager.

"Now," he said, opening his arms.

"Never!" she replied, drawing back.

"Nonsense! How can you get to the other side?"

"I suppose I can manage it as you did."

"You will spoil your clothes all for the sake of an absurd prejudice."

"My prejudice is nothing to you."

"Perhaps not, but you can't make a bridge out of it."

"Come along, Miss Sellers, you needn't be afraid," cried the impatient Beatrice.

"It's quite safe," put in Marian, "if you hold on tight by his neck."

Marston laughed: "There, you see, I have got my certificate."

Ruby looked down in sore perplexity at her dress. It was nearly new, and to spoil it was really a pity, but rather than be carried by Captain Marston she would have crawled across on her hands and knees in her best black cashmere if she had not had another garment to put on when she reached home. If she could only get rid of the obnoxious

creature, she would pick up her petticoats, and scramble across without much damage.

The children, tired of waiting, ran off. The stable-clock, which could be heard at some distance, chimed the quarter to one. Captain Marston looked at her troubled face with a smile of triumph.

"Why make such a fuss about it, when the whole thing will be over in half a minute?"

"I am not making a fuss. Only if you would kindly leave me I should be very much obliged," she replied, with great dignity.

"Leave you in such a predicament! I really couldn't."

"Then it is useless to wait," and with the determined air of a Roman matron she stretched out a small foot, in its neatly fitting boot; but just as it was about to touch the water he called out to her not to be in such a hurry.

"If you are so very obstinate as to decline my help, and if you are accustomed to practise on the tight-rope, I think I see another way to get you across dry-shod. Don't look at me so suspiciously," he added, with a laugh, as he walked towards a small trunk which was lying on some broken ferns at a little distance. With some difficulty he dragged it to the stream, raised it to an upright position, let it go, and found to his satisfaction that the other end reached to the further bank.

"There," he said, cheerfully; "with my hand to steady you, do you think you can get over on that?"

"Oh, yes; I am sure I can," and she began to try without loss of time.

"You are always sure of yourself."

"That is a comfort."

"Why are you never so sure of me?"

"Ask yourself."

"I never get an answer. Keep steady, and don't be in a hurry."

Her feet slipped, the tree shook, but, breathless and thankful, she got to the other side.

"Thanks for your help," she said, with real gratitude, as she tried to draw her hand from his. "Now I must run."

"One moment," he bent towards her, his flashing eyes fixed on her glowing cheeks. "Tell me where Violet is, and, on my word of honour, I won't plague you any more."

She raised her eyebrows with an air of impatient inquiry.

"Your honour? Captain Marston, where is it?"

He dropped her hand with a curse, and she fled with the speed of a lapwing, whilst he looked after her with an angry scowl.

"Halloo, Marston, what are you doing here?"

He started violently as Harold Jerningham, who had come, gun in hand, from under the trees, slapped him on the back.

"No use attempting to shoot; my eye was all wrong; suppose I am bilious. A pity you did not come a little sooner to carry Miss St. Hellers over the brook. It was a capital joke to see her trampling on the bank."

"You didn't do it!" with a quick glance into his face.

"You had better ask her. Have a wood!"

"Thanks, I have smoked enough already. Let us go home to luncheon."

Side by side the two friends walked through the wood and over a wide stretch of grass, till they reached the gate leading into the private shrubberies. Each was occupied with his own thoughts. Jerningham had caught sight of Ruby hurrying away, as it seemed, from a *tête-à-tête* with Marston, and the fear lest she was more intimate with him than she had chosen to confess, disturbed his mind greatly.

He would not have expected her to let any man carry her across a stream, when the road was only half a mile off; but women were the most disappointing creatures upon earth, and it was useless to imagine that there were any exceptions to the general rule.

Marston, meanwhile, was racking his fertile brains for the unworthy purpose of getting a hold over Ruby, and constraining her to do what he wished. Violet he must find, by hook or by crook. His whole heart was set on her now, although last night he had almost worked him-

self into the belief that her twin-sister would do as well. She had Violet's face, it is true, but even in the old days she had never been loving and tender to him as his own promised bride; and now, if it was not all a pretence, she would go so far in her absurd prejudices as to hate the very ground on which he trod.

He must master her, he vowed to himself with an oath, as he threw his hat down on the hall table. If he ruined her life in the effort, nothing should stop him; but his touch should be soft as velvet when he meant to strike the hardest.

The clouds were gathering fast over Ruby St. Hellers' future, but she went on her way with quiet patience, trying humbly and cheerfully to do her duty on that difficult path which Heaven had laid before her. "For Violet's sake," surely that thought must lend sweetness to the hardest task.

The next day, to Ruby's great relief, Captain Marston went away, promising to return before Christmas.

For a long time she was left with the children in the big, lonely house, with no one to talk to but Marian and Beatrice, or Mrs. Nicholson, the housekeeper, who sometimes looked in for a chat during the long winter evenings.

Harold had gone back to work at the Treasury, The Earl and Countess, with their eldest daughter, after paying a series of visits in different counties, had settled down for the present in their London house, so the reception-rooms were shut up, and the long passages seemed longer than ever, and still more ghostly.

Weeks passed away, and towards the middle of December Lord Alverley, the eldest son, came down with a party of sportsmen, who made a great deal of noise when they left the smoking-room at night for their bedrooms in the bachelors' corridor.

Ruby never saw them, for during the absence of the mistress of the house she ate, drank, and taught in the schoolroom, rarely leaving it for any other room.

She heard their guns popping in every direction, but she was careful to avoid the home covers when she took the children out for a walk.

She was sitting alone as usual, with her toes on the fender, and a book on her lap, when the stable clock chimed half-past ten.

"Nearly time to go to bed," she thought, regretfully, as her eye fell on a bottle on the mantelpiece; "and I quite forgot to send Mrs. Watson the medicine I promised her for her boy. She will be up all night with him, I dare say, and it will be my fault. I'm dreadfully sorry. If this were only my home I should think nothing of running across the park; but here, I suppose, they would think me mad if they saw me. What was that?" starting so violently that her book fell down upon the ground.

Something which sounded like a stone hit the window—again—and once again! Who was there in the whole wide world who could want an interview with her at that time of night!

Her heart beat so loud that she could scarcely hear if the signal were repeated, as she went to the window and looked out. At first she could see nothing, but as her eyes became more accustomed to the darkness she made out some dark object on the terrace below. Was it man or woman? She could not tell. She pressed her forehead to the cold glass in a sudden access of fear. Was it fancy, or did a voice really cry, "Ruby, Ruby, come to me!" No; it was no delusion—it spoke again, and this time the window was flung up in all haste, and two arms were stretched out in eager response, "My darling, what brought you here?"

CHAPTER IV.

"Come down, and speak to me as quickly as you can," were the words that came through the darkness.

"I'm coming dearest," and Ruby darted into her bedroom, caught up her fur-cloak, and for some inexplicable reason, which puzzled herself, slipped the bottle of medicine on the mantel-

piece into her pocket, and opening her door softly, sped swiftly and stealthily down the broad stairs across the vast hall, along a short passage into the breakfast-room. This room was exactly under her own, and not being on the terrace, like most of the sitting-rooms, communicated with the garden by a small iron staircase.

The house was as silent as death; not a sound came from either smoking or billiard-room, which surprised her much. Concluding that Lord Alverley had taken the whole party to dine at a neighbouring Squire's, she breathed more freely, though her fingers were trembling so that she could scarcely unbar the shutter, or open the French window. But when this was accomplished she flew down the staircase, with arms already held out in eager affection.

Violet St. Hellers threw herself upon her sister's neck, and sobbed.

"Something terrible must have happened—what is it?" asked Ruby, in the greatest anxiety, as she kept her close against her heart. "Tell me, for Heaven's sake."

"Nothing; only I could not bear it any longer. It was so miserable without you."

"But at this time of night!" in tender reproach.

"Yes, I know; but I thought you would not like me to come in the daytime. It might—" with a small smile on her quivering lips—"it might be a case of 'no followers allowed.'"

"As if they would keep my sister from me! But how did you know my window from the others? Only think if you had made a mistake, and one of Lord Alverley's friends had discovered you!"

"There was no chance of that. Have you forgotten the drawing you sent me? There was a little staircase just under your room, and I knew it by that. I walked all round the place till I came to it, feeling like a burglar, but there was nobody about."

"Poor child, what a mad idea! Come in, I must speak to Mrs. Nicholson. I don't suppose Lady Chester could possibly object to your sleeping with me."

"I'm not coming in."

"But you must."

Violet shook her head resolutely. "I swore by everything that was most binding that I would come home by the 11.15 train, and the poor old thing would never trust me again."

"How could she let you come!"

"I did not ask her," with a soft laugh. "She saw that nothing would keep me away, so wisely gave in. But don't worry yourself about me, for she is actually coming to the station to meet me. I travelled third-class, because my money was nearly at an end, and a charming navy officer met me on orange out of his grimy pocket."

Ruby shivered.

Violet patted her cheek affectionately. "I believe you think I am fit to be wrapped up in cotton-wool, and placed in a band-box, whilst you are knocking about the world without a thought or care for yourself. Oh, Ruby," and down went the soft cheek upon her sister's shoulder. "I feel such a brute for letting you work for us both, but I couldn't do it, you know—no one would have me. I never could remember a date, and as to geography I sometimes think I never could have learnt it."

"Now, Violet, haven't I always told you," and Ruby's sweet voice was very grave, "that I could not get on at all if it weren't for the thought that you were waiting for me somewhere; no matter how small the lodging, it is everything to have one little spot to call your home!" The tears were rolling down her cheeks, but she brushed them hastily away. "If you really must go by that horrid train I suppose we ought to be off."

"Are you coming with me?" in great delight.

"Of course I am—at least across the park, and then the station is only such a little way off down the high-road; but I must take care to secure my retreat," she said with a smile, as she ran up the staircase, blew out her candle, pulled the shutter to without barring it, shut the window, and came back to her sister as speedily as possible.

"Oh, Ruby, I have such a heap to ask you," sighed Violet, "and the time is so short."

"Ask away," said Ruby, trying to be gay. "And it will be my turn next. This way through the garden is the shortest; but as old Nurse used to say we must put our best foot foremost."

"I haven't a best foot; both are so tired."

"Poor child, lean on me."

"Ruby," in a shy whisper, "you haven't heard anything of him!"

"Not for a long while. How could I! For six weeks I have been all alone in the house with the children."

A heavy sigh was the only answer.

"You must not think of him, Violet; I thought what dear papa told you was sufficient to cure you. You must be mad."

"I know it; but," drooping her head sadly, "I like to be mad sometimes. If it were not for the hope of seeing him again, I should die. Only think, Ruby, what it is to go on day after day, as I do, in a miserable lodging. I must look forward to something or—"

"I know, dear," and a look of pain came across her face. "Bear it if you can with patience, and then when Aunt Augusta comes back from India, perhaps she will ask you to live with her."

"And do you think I am such a wretch that I could be content, whilst you were slaving here!"

"If you thought it made me happy to know that you had a proper roof over your head."

"Oh, I assure you in Chatterton-street we are as proper as possible; not a man comes to the house unless he has a tradesman's basket on his arm. I would have fallen ill on purpose to send for the doctor, only I was frightened by the thought of his bill."

"I am glad you were. Doctors may be as dangerous as anyone else. Now you must climb over this railing, take care of that stone, and here we are at the stile."

"You will come back to me at Christmas!" and Violet clung to her sister's neck, as if she could not make up her mind to part from her.

"I hope so. Take care of yourself, my darling, and never do this again. I think I had better come with you to the station."

"No, you might get into trouble. Good-bye!" A long clinging kiss, a broken "Heaven be with you, dear," from Ruby, and they parted; Violet flying down the high-road as fast as her legs could take her, and the sister, whose mission it seemed to be to watch over her like a mother, standing still to look after her. A wave of the hand, as the slight figure which so exactly resembled her own, reached the corner, and Ruby turned away with a full heart.

The park looked doubly dark and gloomy as she turned her face homewards. Drawing the hood of her cloak further over her head, she went on bravely. There was a chink of light behind Watson's, the gamekeeper's shutter, so she went a few yards out of her way to leave the bottle of medicine for his boy. She was glad to do this for her own sake, as if anyone chanced to meet her on her return, it would give a reasonable pretext for her appearance in the park at that time of night.

Mrs. Watson answered her tap at once, but

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was extremely surprised at the sight of her visitor. "The boy, thank you, Miss, is that bad that I am well-nigh distracted; but lawk-a-mercy, to think of you a bringing of it on a night like this!" gasped.

"I forgot it before, and it doesn't rain. I can't stop now, thank you; good-night. I shall come and ask after him to-morrow," and Ruby hurried away.

Mrs. Watson shut the door behind her, and followed her down the path. "You see," she said, in a mysterious whisper, "I can't keep the door open for a minute, lest them that shouldn't might see the light, and I haven't a man or boy about the place to send home with you, Miss; for they are all out with the gentlemen from the house, a watching for the poachers."

"Do you mean to say they are in the park!" and the poor girl's heart went down into her boots.

"Somewhere there about, I don't know precisely, but I haven't heard a shot all the evening through; so I doubt if somebody hasn't given them a warning. Good-night, and thank you kindly, Miss; if it weren't for my boy, I would come with you myself."

Poor Ruby felt lonely, indeed, when the cottage door shut, and she was left outside in the darkness; but scolding herself for her cowardice she hastened into the shadow of the wood, fearing lest someone might catch sight of her figure if she ventured across the open.

It was an unpleasant thought that watchful eyes were all round her, although their owners were unseen, every tree might hide a poacher; or, worse still, one of the gentlemen who had come out for the purpose of catching him.

Frightened by a sound behind her, which was probably a rabbit scudding through the bracken, disturbed from his sleep, she began to run, and when she had once begun, she lacked the nerve to stop.

The way was difficult enough to see at any pace; but running so fast she soon lost the path, and went stumbling on through briars and ferns, her heart beating loudly at every twig that caught her dress in her wild career.

There was no moon, and the sky was so cloudy that the stars gave little light. The grey stem of a silver birch looked like a ghost standing menacingly before her. With a deep drawn breath she bounded to one side, and was caught panting and breathless in a pair of strong arms!

(To be continued.)

FROU-FROU.

—101—

WHEN Robert Moore walked into the drawing-room of Mr. Duncan's house a pretty petite figure, clad in blue velvet, emerged from one corner of the sofa. Simultaneously a dumpy bundle of long curly white hair, the pet poodle of pretty Beatrix Aldrich, and our hero's particular aversion, flew at him with a salute of short, snapping barks.

"Frou-Frou!" cried Miss Trix, reproachfully. "Come here, you naughty doggy! Don't mind her, Robert. She won't bite."

Nevertheless, Frou-Frou had caught hold of the leg of Robert's trousers, and was worrying her sharp little teeth through the cloth. Robert shook her off with a smothered exclamation of disgust. He hated poodles, and this one in particular.

Frou-Frou, being flung off with considerable force, fell against the piano-leg, and forthwith set up a howl.

"I wish you wouldn't be so rough with her, Robert," said Trix, gathering up her pet and cuddling it fondly. "Poor little Frou-Frou! It was an abused doggy, so it was, and Trix won't let them knock it about so."

"I don't see why you always keep that little beast about you, Trix," said Robert, savagely.

"I keep it because I want to."

"If it were only good for something besides snapping at one's heels I wouldn't mind. But it is such a stupid, ugly little brute!"

"Ugly!" echoed Trix, indignantly. "I don't see how you can say that! Frou-Frou is a very pretty dog. Everybody says so. But you never did like her, Robert. I suppose it is not to be expected that you would, when Captain Ellis gave her to me."

This last was said with a vindictive little frown, that brought the colour flaming into Robert Moore's face.

"You know what I think about your accepting presents from gentlemen, Beatriz," he said, shortly. "But, never since we have been engaged," this with an angry emphasis, "have you shown the slightest regard for what I think or say in such matters."

"Well," said Trix, with a rebellious pout, "you are always saying such absurd things. You know I wouldn't give up Frou-Frou for anyone—not for anybody in the world!"

"Did I ever ask you to give up Frou-Frou?" "Well, you've been awfully disagreeable about the poor, dear darling."

"I shall be very careful what I say hereafter." The tone in which he spoke made Miss Trix look up quickly, and her sunny blue eyes clouded.

"Don't look at me in that way, Robert," she cried. "You know I don't like you to look like that."

"Do you think you really know what you do want, Beatriz?" he said, impatiently, as he walked up and down the room.

"Don't call me Beatriz!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears. "I hate to be called Beatriz, and you—you've called me that twice."

Robert looked out of the window, then at the little sobbing figure on the sofa. She was hardly more than a child, and never, he sometimes thought, would be anything else; yet how this great, strong man did love her! He could not bear to see her cry. It was folly to quarrel with her, anyhow. A wave of tenderness swept over Robert's heart, and, obeying its warm impulse, he took Miss Trix in his arms.

"Don't cry, darling!" he said, brushing the golden curls away from the flushed, tear-wet face. "Dry your eyes. There! you're making them all red, and I have come to take you down to the flower-show. Run along and get your hat on."

It took about fifteen minutes of alternate kissing, petting, and cajolery to drive away the clouds from Trix's face. But she tripped away smiling at last, with Frou-Frou following her. At the end of ten minutes more, she came back in her jacket and hat, carrying a pretty sunshade and Miss Frou-Frou.

Robert's face clouded instantly.

"Trix," he said, "you are not going to take that—that dog with you!"

"Why, of course! I always take Frou-Frou."

"Not when I am with you!"

"Why, Robert!" she exclaimed in arieved tone. "I thought you said you were going to be good to me?"

"I am, if you will let me. But I object most distinctly to that poodle. I am not going along the street with you, if you carry Frou-Frou. If there is anything I detest, it is to see a woman going along with a dog under her arm."

"Very well," said Trix, sitting down, with a stubborn look on her baby face. "You can go alone, then. Frou-Frou and I must go together, if we go at all—mustn't we, Frou-Frou?"

"Am I to understand, then," said Robert, "that you refuse to leave the dog behind?"

"Yes."

"Then I must bid you good-morning," he said, curtly; and, before Trix was aware of it, he had stalked out of the room, banged the front-door, and was gone.

Trix sat still for a moment or two, actually dolloqued; then she broke out into a savage soliloquy:

"The idea! I suppose he thinks I am going to give way to him in everything. If I began that way I couldn't call my soul my own when we were married. Catch me letting any man domineer over me so! No, Mr. Robert! you can't do that. I have as much right to my way as you have to yours, and I'm going to have it."

With this rebellious speech, Miss Trix flounced upstairs and took off her things. The next day, a messenger was despatched to the office of Mr. Robert Moore, with the following communication—

"MR. ROBERT MOORE,

"I am satisfied that we have made a mistake. We could never be happy together, and it is better for us to separate than to risk a life of infelicity. (Trix thought this sounded very well.) I return to you your ring, begging you will consider our engagement at an end. When you receive this I shall have left Mr. Duncan's. I am going to travel, so that we may perhaps never meet again. Good-bye. I shall never marry; but I wish you much happiness."

"BEATRIZ BLANCHE ALDRICH."

When Robert got this note, he sprang into a cab and dashed off to Mr. Duncan's. Miss Dolly Duncan received him rather laughingly. She was evidently in Trix's confidence, and sided with her.

"Miss Aldrich has gone to London," she said, coldly. "I cannot give you her address."

Robert bit his lip. Trix was in earnest, then! He went home, packed his valise, and took the next train for London. As he sat in the smoking-carriage, vainly trying to puff away his discomfiture, he said,—

"If I can only see her I am sure I can bring her to reason. But how shall I find her?"

There had been a time when Robert had dreamed of the woman who was to be his wife—a splendid regal creature, at whose feet he was willing to prostrate himself, in adoration of her rare intellectuality and strong womanhood. Why should he care, if Trix Aldrich had thrown him over for a woolly white poodle? What a fool he had been to give her the chance! And yet there was something about her, childish as she often seemed, that had, for him, an inexpressible charm.

After all, she was for him the one woman in the whole world. Hence, he was thundering along on his way to London, pursued by a cruel fear that he would not find her, and thinking that if he only had that wilful golden head resting on his shoulder again he could somehow bring her to reason.

The next morning he woke up in his room at the hotel, and made up his mind that he would inspect all the West End hotels, to see where Trix had gone. He did this; but he could not find her.

At last, coming out one day, he was moodily thinking he might as well go home, when an incident occurred which at once changed all his plans.

The street was thronged with vehicles, and Robert was standing on the kerb, waiting for a chance to cross, when suddenly, from among the crowd on the pavement, out darted a fluffy white poodle, with a blue ribbon in its collar. The dog was evidently lost; for it ran helplessly first one way and then the other; and finally, in a fit of bewilderment, dashed right in among the passing carriages.

Poor little dog—it was frightened to death; and surely the wheels would have crushed it utterly had not Robert rushed forward, with a sudden feeling of pity, caught up the poor dog and passed with it to the other side. There he stood, looking around for the owner of the poodle. But no one was forthcoming. Meantime, he saw that the dog had not wholly escaped—there was blood on its white coat. Evidently it was hurt internally.

"I think it's lost," said a big policeman, who came up and began at once to speculate about a possible reward. "Better take it home with you."

Robert looked ruefully at the soft little bundle of wool, which was spattered all over with mud; with here and there a stain of blood. One would have thought that he would have turned the poodle over to the policeman's care. But our hero was one who could never resist the sight of suffering, even in a brute; and the dumb, pitiful appeal in the dog's eyes moved him beyond belief.

"Poor little dog," he said, "I'm afraid it's badly hurt."

"Better take it home, sir, and send for a doctor," repeated the policeman. "It may pull through yet."

"It looks to me," answered Robert, "as if it were hurt internally—and fatally."

Before the policeman could reply, a sudden shriek was heard, and a delicate girlish figure came rushing along the pavement. On hearing the shriek the poodle looked up as if it recognised familiar tones; its dim eyes brightened when it saw who uttered them; it struggled faintly, as if to escape from Robert's arms.

"Oh, my poor darling!" cried the newcomer. "What has happened? Are you hurt? Why did you run away! Please, sir, give her to—"

Up to this moment, in her excitement, the speaker had seen only the dog. She now recognised Robert. She stopped, flushing painfully.

"I rescued her from under a carriage-wheel, dear," said her lover; for it was Trix who had rushed up; "but alas! too late, I fear. I am so sorry."

As he spoke, he put the dog tenderly in the girl's arms.

"Oh! oh!" cried Trix, "my poor Frou-Frou! I had gone into a shop, you see," she said, turning to Robert, as if half-apologetically, "leaving her in the carriage. She sprang out, ran away, and got lost; and now, now—"

She burst into tears. The dog saw it, and looked up at her with infinite sympathy in its eyes, as if it knew and would gladly share her trouble. Robert was inexpressibly softened.

"Let me take you and Frou-Frou to your carriage," he said, kindly. "Let me see you home. Perhaps Frou-Frou is not so much hurt, after all."

Could the dog understand? Whether it could or not, it looked from one to the other with a look that seemed to say it knew better; then, sinking back, with a moan, into the arms of its mistress, it lay there motionless. It did not stir, even when they reached the carriage; but, before they had gone many streets, it suddenly gave a shiver, opened its eyes, looked up at her mistress pitifully, sighed, and sank back. Poor Frou-Frou was dead.

Over her grave the lovers forgot their estrangement. If she had separated them while living, in death she reunited them. Trix, weeping on Robert's shoulder, forgot her anger at him; Robert, soothing her, forgot her pettishness and injustice. She yielded to his kisses, no longer now rejecting them; she smiled thankfully when he replaced the betrothal-ring on her finger. She murmured,—

"Oh, how kind you were to poor Frou-Frou. How shall I ever repay you?"

Trix, after that, never had another favourite. She has long been married, and is the happiest of wives and mothers. With her children's arms about her neck, and their kisses on her cheeks, and the love of her husband, she has nothing more, she says, to ask for in this world. You would hardly know her for the wilful, childish Trix of the old days.

The commonest sound of pleasurable emotion—the ordinary purr—has no purpose to serve; it is an outcome of pure satisfaction, and is thus slightly distinguished from a chirrup—the nearest approach a cat makes to response in utterance when it is affectionately addressed. The response by backward movement of the ears is more frequent. The chuckle of pleasurable excitement is used when the cat is quite unaware of the presence of people or other cats, as much as when it is playing with a person or an animal companion. Again, a cat mews to itself when it is bored or hungry; but if it is making a direct appeal for food, does so, unless it is painfully hungry, with a very small voice or a mouth silently opened. Except, perhaps, for the chirrup of response, the call appears to be the only real approach to language; and here it seems possible that the cat does really listen for a response, and call again.

A DISLOYAL LOVE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A HINTER.

In a gorgeously-furnished drawing-room sat a young girl, with an air of expectancy upon her sweet face.

She was barely in keeping with the amber damask hangings, or the mirror-panelled apartment, with its beautiful statuary grouped in the corners, and its magnificent chins, and brilliant colouring, for she was gentle-looking and almost dove-like in appearance, with dark, timid, guileless eyes, and a pale sweet face—so small and slight in form that she seemed lost in the capacious room in which she was sitting.

Dorothy Dunraven was the elder daughter of a rich city merchant—a man who liked to make a goodly show with his money, and to let the world know where he was to be found in it.

Mr. Dunraven never could quite understand his daughter Dorothy, and her retiring ways, her almost quaker-like dresses, of white, and soft greys, and browns, and black, which became her so well.

His wife's handsome costumes of rich silks and laces were quite in accordance with his ideas, and so were the stylish "toilettes" of his younger daughter Elise, who, although still a child in years, was a head taller than her elder sister, and looked altogether more of a woman, and a woman of the world.

But Elise was generally at school in France, and it was only during the holidays that Mr. Dunraven could hold her up as a model in dress and manners to his eldest child.

Dorothy, however, paid but little heed to his remarks. She had one of those calm, self-reliant natures which hold strongly to their own views and opinions, and are far more difficult to turn than the most assertive and blatant.

She said nothing when her dresses were laughed at, being conscious that in reality they were far more elegant than the more showy ones of her mother and sister.

She always had them from the best milliners; they fitted to perfection, and the soft lace that nestled round her slender throat and wrists was of the rarest.

She took a letter from her pocket and re-read it, then glanced at the splendid white and gold clock on the mantel, and a faint rose hue flickered on her cheeks.

"He is due now!" she whispered to herself, as she went to the window and looked out. "How glad I am to be alone to-day! It was fortunate my mother had started for London before his letter arrived."

The sound of wheels came grating over the gravel, and the rose-hue deepened, that was all.

She did not go out to meet her visitor; indeed, she retired into the room, that he might not see her watching; and although her fingers trembled, she got some needlework out from her work-basket and began to ply her needle, so that Sir Edmund Drake found an apparently very calm little lady awaiting him when he was ushered into the room, but she could not hide the soft glad light in the rarely beautiful eyes as she raised them to the face of the tall man who was bending towards her.

"Mamma is out, Sir Edmund. Will you mind very much?" she said, shyly.

"Shall I mind very much, Dorothy? Now, do you really believe I shall mind at all? Do you think my visit is to her, or to you, little one?"

She did not attempt to reply to his query, but continued,—

"Mamma had left for London before I heard from you, or I am sure she would not have gone!"

"Are you sorry she had started?" he demanded, taking possession of her hand.

Again she did not reply to him, nor did she

release the tiny fingers which were clasped in his.

"I must have an answer, Dorothy!" and he passed his arm round her waist, and raised her face to his with his hand, as though she were a child.

"Dorothy! Confess—were you sorry?"

"No!"

"That is honest. I like an honest woman who will tell the truth—and now another confession. Are you glad to see me?"

"Yes! I think I am, a little," she returned, with a mischievous flash from the soft eyes.

"A little!" he echoed, in a tone of reproach. "That is not honest at all. I retract my former praise, unless you deserve it better. And now that I am here, and we are alone, and you are just a little glad to see me, what shall we talk about, small Dorothy?"

"How should I know! How can I possibly tell?"

"Oh, you have not pictured our meeting, then, at all! Have not wondered what I had to say to you to bring me so far?"

"Not much," she faltered, slipping from his arms, and perching herself upon the sofa.

"You don't like me to touch you, then?"

"No; it is treating me rather like a child to hold my face up like that."

He laughed heartily.

"Dorothy, how long have you posed for being so very grown-up? There is not much of you, even now."

"I cannot help being small," she replied, with a flush; "but surely, Sir Edmund, you did not come all this way to laugh at the size of my stature!"

"No, dear! I am laughing at your dignity."

"It is out of place, perhaps, but it is a part of my nature to be reserved. I do not think dignity is the right name for it."

"Well, we won't quarrel about it, child. What has mamma gone to London for?"

"To do some shopping and to meet Elise, who is coming home for a month. They will not return till to-morrow night."

"I have never seen your sister. Is she like you?"

"Not a bit. She is a fine girl, and will be a beautiful woman, but she is barely fifteen now. Elise would not appreciate being considered like me at all."

"And yet you are the sweetest child on earth?"

"I am not a child! I am eighteen. I wish you would not treat me as though I were eight instead!"

"Very well, Dorothy. Darling—will you be my wife! Now, is that treating you as a woman?" and he caught her by both her hands and held her captive.

"Now you are laughing at me!"

"Not so, sweetheart. It is that I have come all this way to say to you, dear, Dorothy, I am so very, very fond of you! Have you not often been sure of it without any words of mine?"

"I have thought sometimes that you liked me—a little."

"And were you glad?"

"I think so."

"Do you only think so, dear? Have you not felt sure?"

"How could I, till you told me!"

"I believe one can. With all your reserve, small Dorothy, I have felt quite certain of your love for me!"

"That was concealed," she returned, smiling at him. "Girls don't give away their affection until they are asked for it. I must deny the soft impeachment."

"Nonsense! Eyes and voice and hands are traitors, and betray you when you least guess it. Little Dorothy, you will never love any other man as you love me. Come, tell the truth! Own it, dear, and make me happy!"

He drew her near to him as he spoke, and a bright smile settled about her mouth.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, softly, and he gathered her within his arms, while she nestled there contentedly.

"Did you know I had come to tell you this?"

"I thought so!"

"Ah, I have caught you! You had thought about it, then?"

"Yes."

"Little one, I must punish you for telling stories," and he kissed her again and again.

"Is that how you will always punish me for doing wrong, Sir Edmund?"

"Sir! Now, Dorothy, what do you deserve?"

"Edmund, then."

"Yes, I shall always kiss you when you are troublesome."

"Then I shall be naughty very often!" she laughed, and he caught her in his arms again, to punish her in his own fashion, when the door opened, and Mr. Dunraven stood in the room regarding them, and with an ostentatious cough he announced his presence.

"Oh, papa! I did not expect you home," said Dorothy, her face ablaze.

"So it seems, my dear! Sir Edmund, I shall be happy to see you in the library," and he offered his hand to the Baronet. "Pretty place this of mine; you have not been here before! Nothing like the Thames to my mind; near London, and quite away from it. Bucks is one of the prettiest counties in England. Find me such a piece of wood as the Burnham Beeches anywhere else and I'll go a hundred miles to see it! We have all the advantages of river, country, and London all rolled into one. Holloa! what's become of Dorothy? She has bolted!"

"I daresay she felt a little shy at your coming in so unexpectedly just now."

"And catching you, eh? Well! what does it all mean, Drake?"

"It merely means that I have asked your daughter to be my wife, Mr. Dunraven, and I hope you will consent to our union."

"The girl is too young. I couldn't let a daughter of mine marry till she is twenty-one."

And the merchant thrust his hands into his pockets, as though he found that decision in their very depths.

"Three years is a long time to wait, but it will come to an end some day," returned the Baronet.

"Just so; and as to means, you can afford to keep her, I suppose!"

"Oh, yes! I can afford to keep her; but not in a home of luxury like this."

"In fact, you want money with her!"

"For her sake, yes. But I would marry her without a penny; she is such a gentle, unique girl."

"Unique! Ha, ha! You aristocrats have a wonderful way of expressing yourselves, but I don't know but what you are right. Dorothy is one standing alone. I have never seen anyone like her. Her sister will have more style, but Dorothy is as good as gold; the sort of stuff the old martyrs were made of. You can't turn her a quarter of an inch, if she has made up her mind a thing is right."

"I have known her some time, and have watched her narrowly. I am certain she is a good, true girl, and will make a good, true wife."

Mr. Dunraven's weak point was his daughters; and he now administered a hearty slap on the Baronet's back.

"There, there! We shan't quarrel about the money! See, the girl is standing by the river-side feeding the swans. You would like to join her, I daresay. Where is your portmanteau?"

"In London."

"Then telegraph for it to be sent down."

Mrs. Dunraven won't be home till to-morrow night, and you must ask her consent as well as mine."

Nothing loth, the Baronet did as he was desired, and in a short space of time he joined Dorothy by the river's brink, where the royal swans were gathered around her, expecting bread from her white hands, and she stood by the drooping boughs of the tender green willow-trees, which bent so gracefully to the running stream, kissing it coquettishly when swayed by the wind's gentle touch.

It was a very happy afternoon to both the lovers.

Mr. Danraven had business to attend to, and suggested that Sir Edmund should row his daughter down the river.

And then, the wind freshening, they put up a white sail and ran before it, while they sat side by side, the girl nestling to him with confidence.

"How quiet it seems, just as if you and I were alone in the world, little Dorothy! Do you enjoy it, sweet one?"

"Yes, I am very happy," she replied, softly. "I never knew how lovely the river was until to-day."

"Wait till I take you into society, dear. You will have plenty to enjoy then!"

"I would rather be here, Edmund, far rather, with only you and the beauties of nature around me. Elise is always longing to be in the gay world, but I shrink from it. It seems so shallow, such glare and glitter, with no reality. I came out last season, you know, and I did dislike it so much."

"But, my dear girl, delightful as this is, one could not spend one's life just drifting down the river with the aid of white wings; there will be heavy streams to pull against, storms to breast, and one must have some amusement to counter-balance the lulls of life."

"To be alone with you, and quiet like this, would suit me better than ever such a brilliant assemblage, dear," she said gently.

He stooped and kissed her, not because he agreed with her sentiment, but because the eyes she raised to his were inexpressibly lovely, filled with soft, glad light.

"Well, child, we can come on the river to please you, and go into society too, to please me. Now that is a bargain, is it not, Dorothy?"

He took her hand into his own and she left it there, and so they sailed on, happy in the present, with no thought of evil in the future.

They returned in proper time for dinner; and Sir Edmund being both a good talker and a good listener, got on famously with Mr. Danraven, who being somewhat egotistical, required a hearer with plenty of patience, who knew when to join in, and when to be silent, so they agreed well together.

The next morning proved beautiful, and again the lovers started in the boat, this time taking their luncheon with them, and another happy day was passed.

When they reached home a tall girl was standing upon the lawn looking out for them.

"Who is she?" asked the Baronet, turning to Dorothy; "what a beautiful girl!"

"That is Elise! Yes, she is very pretty."

"Elise! why I thought she was a child!" and he let his eyes rest upon her admiringly, a fact she was not slow to note, for Elise Danraven was a born flirt and coquette.

"Oh! my brown mouse!" she cried, mischievously; "so, quiet as you are, you can go off to play when the cat is away!"

"Meaning whom, Elise?"

"Why, mamma, of course. Have you had a jolly time, old girl, while I have been conjugating verbs?"

"Elise," said Dorothy, quietly, "let me introduce you to Sir Edmund Drake."

"I don't think I have heard of you," returned the girl, "unless you are one of the friends Dorothy made in Scotland last autumn; but she is so close, she never tells us about her fun, however much she has; but she doesn't look as if she gets much; now does she, Sir Edmund? Is she not a demure mouse? And don't you think my name for her just suits her? I can imagine her curling herself in a ball for the winter, in the middle of moss and cotton-wool," and Elise threw her arms round her sister, and gave her a hug.

"It would never do if we all made as much noise in the world as you, Sis; it would be quite a tower of Babel!"

"Not if we all talked one language, stupid!" laughed the girl, jumping into the boat. "Now it is my turn to have some fun! Come, Sir Edmund, pull me up to the look and back, and I will bless you."

The Baronet looked at his fiancée, but before

she could speak Elise had raised two sparkling dark eyes to his, full of mischief and invitation.

"You must come. Dorothy has had her share of you, and, besides, mother is waiting for her. She is in for a scolding, I suppose, as father and mother had a private and confidential, and then mother desired me to tell Dorothy to go to her directly she came home. You'll catch it for going off boating, I expect. Jump in, Sir Edmund. If I get into a scrape too, it will come all the lighter for Mousie."

In another minute Sir Edmund Drake was in mid-stream, with Elise for his companion. Dorothy was watching them from the bank.

He had not wanted to leave his love, but Elise had drawn him away almost against his will, and the bright *espigle* face before him soon made him forget his desertion of her.

"Have you been out long with the mouse?" she asked, presently. "You had rather a slow time of it, hadn't you? There isn't a bit of fun in Dorothy, and I don't think she knows how to flirt!"

"I don't think the same can be said of her younger sister," returned Sir Edmund, laughing.

"I! Oh! yes! I flirt! Why shouldn't I?" "I don't see any reason why you shouldn't; in the present company, at any rate," he laughed.

"That's a challenge!" cried Elise. "Oh! I am sure we shall get on famously. Here's the lock. What's the use of going back yet. There is plenty of time before dinner! We may as well go on!"

"What about Dorothy?" he said, hesitatingly.

"Oh! don't fret about her; she'll amuse herself, she always does. No one ever troubles about her; she is always contented. She will sit a whole day at her work, with the rain beating against the window-panes, as cheerful as a cricket, without a word of complaint; and I feel inclined to break all the furniture. It fidgets me to be caged up. Ugh! how slimy the sides of the lock are. Give me the boat-hook to hold on. Girls look awfully nice holding on like this; quite picturesque; now, don't they?"

He raised his eyes to look at her, and was struck anew with her beauty.

The tall, slight figure was willowy and lithe, and was shown off to advantage by the position in which she was standing, while the stylish Parisian costume was most uncommon-looking; and a white sailor-hat covered the glossy dark brown hair, which peeped beneath the brim in soft curls, looking doubly dark against the pure white skin.

The laughing brown eyes were looking down on him, seeking his admiration, and the pretty red lips were apart, showing her pearly-white and even teeth; the nose was saucy, and inclined to be tip-tilted, but was only sufficiently so as to give expression to the bright face—a face upon which no line of care, or even thought, could be traced.

Her naturally beautiful colour was now heightened by the excitement of the fun, and she would have made a perfect model for a Juliet at that moment, and there are few men who would not have wished to pose for her Romeo. Certainly Sir Edmund Drake was not one of that small number.

"How far shall we go up?" she asked, laughing.

"I am your slave to command!" he replied. "But I expect you would want to be king too. You know the poem of 'King and Slave,' don't you?" and she began to quote in far from a bad style; then she suddenly broke off. "I say, wouldn't it be fun not to go home to dinner?"

"Great fun; but I think we must go, for all that."

"Oh, you are a nasty fellow! If I am game to get into a row, you might be!" and the rosy mouth was drawn into a veritable pout.

"You look prettier when you smile, Elise."

"Oh, you do think me pretty, then?" she asked, with conscious vanity, and the pout vanished.

"Yes, you are very pretty!" and the look

which he gave her sent the hot blood coursing over neck and brow.

To do her justice, Elise Danraven had not the faintest idea that this man with whom she was amusing herself was engaged to her sister, or that there was anything between them.

That Dorothy should even have an admirer was a thing she had never considered possible. Dorothy always was so quiet and gentle that the idea of her captivating a handsome Baronet never once entered the girl's head.

As to that Baronet himself, his senses were enchained by this siren—for the time being, at any rate—even though he was not ready to acknowledge the fact.

"Which do you really prefer, me or dinner?" she asked, with a thoughtful look. "I would rather stay out here than go home."

"So would I; but we have no choice in the matter."

"Why not? Who is your master?"

"The force of circumstances and the usage of society."

"Gracious, what a well-turned phrase! Let us have it in plain English."

"I am a visitor at your father's house, and am invited by him to dine with his family at a certain hour. If I absent myself he would have deep reason to be annoyed, and he would never ask me again. Do you wish that, Elise?"

"No."

"Then we must go home, and that at once."

"Very well."

There was silence between them, but at length he broke it.

"Elise, you are cross!"

"Why do you call me Elise?"

"Because it is a charming name, and you are a charming girl—that is, when you are good-tempered. I don't know what you may be at other times."

"Do you call all girls by their Christian names?"

"Certainly not. Only when we are very intimate, or I like them very much!"

"Well, you must like me very much, then; for we can't be very intimate, as we only met to-day!" and she smiled at him.

"I'm glad to see the sunshine again, Elise. Yes, I do like you, greatly! You don't object to my calling you Elise, do you?"

"Shall I tell the truth?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I like it!" and once more she relapsed into silence, and even thoughtfulness, for her.

"A penny for your thoughts."

"They're not worth it!" she retorted. "I was thinking of you!"

"Of me?"

"Yes; I was envying you!"

"Why?"

"Because I hate my life so! You have freedom; you can go where you like, and do what you like, and no one can say a word to you. I have always to obey someone, or get punished for it! Fancy punishing anyone of my size! It does seem absurd, does it not? But if I don't please Madame Figeard I have a task set me to learn, or sew, or I am ordered to stand at breakfast, or some other humiliating nonsense. I tell you it maddens me! I have too much spirit to put up with it. Some day I shall run away, and that will be the end of it!"

"Alone, Elise?"

She blushed hotly.

"I didn't mean anything of that sort; but I might do even that if I were tempted," she added, with a laugh. "I am miserable at school, and I long so to see the world untrammelled!"

"A woman can never be quite untrammelled. But how I should like taking you into the world with me. You would know how to enjoy it; would you not, Elise?"

"I should, indeed. Tell me about it, Sir Edmund. I love having someone to tell me about all the gay sights and scenes. Dorothy says she can see nothing in them to enjoy, so you may guess her descriptions are not very graphic!"

"Poor Dorothy!" he said, regretfully. "She has a gentle nature. She is a dear, good girl!"

"No doubt of that." Then she added,

sandily, letting the water ripple over her long white fingers, "Do you like good things, Sir Edmund? I think they are awfully insipid!"

He caught the tempting white hand, and let the boat drift.

"You are a siren!" he whispered, "and would tempt St. Anthony himself!"

"Are you at all like him, do you think?" she inquired, innocently.

"In appearance or morals?" he laughed.

"In neither, I should say!" she responded, laughing too. "You wouldn't even try to attend to your book if a pretty girl came by, but would turn down the page, to save trouble, and call her by her Christian name to come to you!"

"Oh, Elise, Elise! A woman with two bright eyes is the worst devil of all!"

"The present company always excepted, of course. I'm not a devil now, am I?" and she raised her bright eyes to his, flashing with mischief.

"I do not know," he said, releasing her hand, and did not speak again till the boat touched the camp-shedding beside the Riverdale Lawn.

He turned his eyes to right and left, but no one was in sight.

Dorothy was not watching for him.

He had fancied that she would have waited to welcome him home, and he was disappointed.

"You have not been a very pleasant companion for the last ten minutes," said the girl, as she rose to leave the boat. "Who is cross now, I should like to know, and what is it all about?"

It was simply that a little prick of conscience had made him rough to her, because she had led him into forgetting Dorothy. But now it seemed Dorothy was not thinking much of him either, and he put conscience aside.

"I am afraid I was churlish, Elise; but you will forgive me, won't you?"

"Rather! I think you are ever so nice!"

"Then we shall be friends, shall we not?"

"Do you mean real friends?"

"Yes! here's my hand upon it."

She clasped his hand with a lingering pressure. "I am so glad!" she said, softly; and springing on shore she ran swiftly over the lawn, leaving him alone in surprise.

"Why did she go off like that?" he queried, with a sense of disappointment, for somehow he was expecting some pleasant words with her before going in.

He walked to the house, and seeing Dorothy sitting in the drawing-room, reading, he entered that way.

"You were not watching for us, Dorothy!" he said, with a touch of reproach in his voice.

"No," she answered, calmly, raising her eyes to his face; "I could not tell when you would return."

How impassive she was! how different from her sister Elise!

"You have only ten minutes to dress for dinner, Edmund, and papa is very punctual."

"Very well. What did your mother say, Dora?"

"She was very kind."

"That is right. Then she will give us her blessing?"

"I am sure she will. Where is Elise?"

"She ran in as soon as we touched land."

"You went farther than you intended, did you not? Do you know you have been away three hours, Edmund?"

"No! Was it so long? Elise is amusing, and the time passed pleasantly."

A faint colour flickered to her cheeks; there was a slight quiver of the sensitive mouth; the large eyes dilated as with a sudden fear.

She loved this man so deeply, and his words jarred on her.

He did not notice these signs of her suffering, for she drooped her eyes over her book; and he had turned, chilled by her apparent want of interest, to the door.

"It would kill me if I lost him now—if he could be untrue," she muttered when alone; "but it is impossible. Elise is but a child; and oh! I know he is true! It is only because I love him so dearly that I grudge him even to

Elise." And the tears stood in Dorothy's soft, dark eyes, and quivered in her long lashes.

CHAPTER II.

A NOCTURNAL INTERVIEW.

WHEN Sir Edmund Drake came down the gong had already sounded for dinner, so there was neither time nor opportunity for any words, loving or otherwise, with his fiancée.

Dorothy was very quiet all the evening, but Elise was brilliant, keeping the party alive with her sallies and witty sayings.

Mr. Dunraven had always been proud of his precocious young daughter, and now he was simply delighted with her, and gave way to peals of merriment at her jokes.

"It's a pity I hadn't sent you to France too, Dorothy, my dear," he said; "perhaps they would have knocked some fun into you."

"Dorothy has something better than fun in her, papa!" said Mrs. Dunraven, in a vexed tone. "No one could have a better daughter."

"That is true, my dear, quite true," returned Mr. Dunraven, apologetically. "There never was a better girl; and now, mamma, what will you say to me? I have been in mischief. I've made up a picnic for to-morrow, to Burnham Beeches, to show Sir Edmund what our trees are like."

"That will be jolly!" cried Elise. "I am so glad, you dear old dad; you're one of the right sort, and one day we must have a steam launch up to Oxford. We may, mayn't we?"

"Of course, my dear, and I'll join you if I can. If I can't, why you will get on very well without me."

"Wait and fix a day when you can come, father. We should not enjoy ourselves without you half so much," said Dorothy, laying her hand on her father's.

"There's a compliment to you, Drake. Never mind, she will tell you a different story when I'm not present," and Mr. Dunraven laughed at his own joke.

Elise cast a swift glance at her sister, and on to Sir Edmund, which was not lost on the latter.

"She must be told of our engagement," he decided, and went on talking to Mr. Dunraven.

"Then we start at eleven to-morrow," said Elise, "and meet our friends at the entrance of the wood. I hope you have ordered a good spread, papa! That is half the battle. A fine day, a jolly lunch, and a pleasant companion! Fancy if one got paired off with some stick, whose only polish was on his boots!"

"Oh, I'll find you a nice little lad to flirt with!" laughed her father.

"Thank you! I am capable of finding someone for myself," retorted Elise. "A nice little lad of your choosing would not suit me at all."

"Ha, ha! The peas grow above the sticks in France, Miss Elise; you mean to keep us all in order, I declare. Drake, you would have found that girl a handful, I can tell you," and Mr. Dunraven laughed heartily.

Again the girl glanced at him sharply.

"Elise and I are very good friends, are we not?" and he turned to her in a kindly manner.

She gave him a grateful look, and Dorothy raised her eyes just in time to see it, and a pain shot through her heart, but she made no sign, and was quieter than ever.

"Will you walk round the garden, Dorothy?" asked her lover, leaning over her chair, as they entered the drawing-room; "the moon is out, and the stars are bright—it is a lovely night!"

She rose at once.

"Will you not have your hat?"

"No, thanks; I shall not take cold."

They went out side by side, and he drew her hand within his arm.

"You are very quiet to-night, sweetheart?" he said, gently, as he pressed her more closely to his side.

"Am I? Well, perhaps I am; but I am generally quiet, Edmund. Elise puts me quite in the shade, does she not?"

"I should say she is a very clever girl, and she is really beautiful when she is animated. In a couple of years' time there will not be a girl in London to compete with her. Elise will be the belle of the season!"

"She has improved in appearance since last she was home."

"Does Elise know of our engagement, Dora?"

"No, I think not. Why?"

"Oh! I can't give a reason; but I should like her to know."

"Of course I shall tell her when I get the chance."

"All right, dear. Tell her to-night that I am to be her brother."

"Very well, I will."

So when she retired to her room that night she drew her younger sister with her.

"Well, Elise, darling, I am very glad to have you home," she said, kindly.

"You can't be so glad as I am, Moussey; you have never been to school in a foreign country."

"No, but I don't suppose it is any worse than being at school in England, and now tell me, Elise. How do you like Sir Edmund?"

"Oh, Dorothy! he's a dear! Why did you never tell me about him? He is handsome, and no mistake!"

"Yes, he is, Elise; but I didn't like to talk of him till I was sure, quite—quite sure."

"Sure. Sure of what?"

"That he loved me."

"My dear Dorothy, what are you talking about! Sir Edmund is the last man to think of a small brown mouse like you. He wants a girl to make a show in the world, and to do him credit in society—a girl of my stamp, Moussey."

"Don't—don't run on so, Elise, dear," returned Dorothy, with a look of pain. "Sir Edmund has asked me to be his wife."

"You! Nonsense, Dorothy; you are joking!"

"I never was more serious."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are engaged to Sir Edmund Drake?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Good night, Dorothy."

"You have not wished me happiness, Elise?"

"I can't."

"Why?"

"You are not suited. You will both be miserable; you will never satisfy him, and he will flirt with other girls under your very nose."

"Elise!"

"Well, I won't say any more, but I can't congratulate you; indeed I can't."

"You can wish me joy!"

"Oh, yes! I can wish it, and I do wish it, Dorothy, but I am very—very sorry."

"And I am very, very glad. Good-night, Elise, Heaven bless you!"

She turned into her room and shut the door gently, while the younger girl sped swiftly down the stairs and out into the garden, with a great sob rising from her heart to her lips.

There was in the grounds a retired nook with a cosy seat overhung with Virginian creepers, and jasmine and ivy, out of the usual garden traffic, and to this spot Elise rushed blindly, and, throwing herself upon the seat, gave vent to a passionate fit of weeping, and there Sir Edmund Drake found her, not by intent, but by one of those unlucky chances which so strangely alter our lives.

He was quietly smoking his pipe of peace before retiring for the night when sounds of distress met his ears, and shaping his course to find out the meaning of them, he came upon the weeping girl.

Now, tears from a woman were a sight Sir Edmund could not stand up against.

When Dorothy had left him with the promise to tell Elise of their engagement he had felt greatly relieved. He had, he knew, been foolish, and he was glad that his real place in the house should be known to all.

He was really fond of Dorothy in a good steady way, and firmly believed in finding happiness by her side.

Still, like many other men, he was weak where

the fair sex were concerned, and he acknowledged to himself that Elise and her witching ways had made him for the moment forget his allegiance to her sister, and he was desirous that it should not happen again.

But when he saw the girl, half-lying, half-sitting, all in a troubled heap, his compassion was stirred.

"Elise, my dear child, what is it! What is your grief? Can I help you?"

Not a word in reply, only the sobbing was stifled and muffled, as by a violent effort. He seated himself beside her, and placed his arm protectingly about her.

She knew the truth now; she could in no way mistake him; it would be unmanly not to strive to comfort her.

"Who has vexed you, Elise?"

She raised her beautiful tear-stained face to his, all white in the moonlight.

"Why did you pretend to like me so much! Why did you ask me to be real friends with you! I will never believe in anyone again; and I did in you—very, very much."

"Believe in me still, Elise. I do like you—more than like you."

Was he mad! But an hour ago he had parted from Dorothy, full of faith in her and in himself.

Now, with his arm about Elise's slim waist, and the girl's beautiful face so near his own, and the knowledge that his grief was all for him—such grief as he could not imagine from his fiancée—he lost his head completely.

"Do you mean that?" she asked, tremulously, fixing her eyes on his, while her bosom rose and fell with agitation. "Then why are you engaged to Dorothy?"

"Hush, Elise, darling! Do not let us speak of her. Remember, I had asked her before I had ever seen you; and even now, what do you know of me! You think you like me because you have seen nothing of society—that is all. When you grow older you will find there are plenty of better fellows in the world than Edmund Drake."

He drew her to him, and her only answer was to cling to him as though he were dearer to her than life.

"Oh!—child! what can I do for you!" he said, his senses responding passionately to her touch; and he kissed the fair face again and again, guiltily, with the knowledge of the wrong thing he was doing, but without the strength of mind to resist self.

"Darling, do you love me so much?" he whispered, holding her close to him, and for reply she caressed his face as a child might do.

The action recalled to him her youth, and he smiled at her.

"Elise, in a few years' time you will laugh at what you think a trouble to-night, and will perhaps blame me for this interview."

"Do you love Dorothy like this?" she inquired, suddenly.

Her arms were about his neck, her cheek was against his, and he could hear her young heart beating wildly.

"No, Elise, not like this!"

"Then you are mine, not hers," she cried, triumphantly, and kissed him of her free will.

A window opened in the house, and Dorothy, dressed in white, with her dark hair around her shoulders, looked out into the night, unconscious of her lover's and her sister's treachery.

One glance at that sweet calm face had stilled his mad passion more than a dozen sermons could have done, and made him ashamed.

"Hush, Elise! For Heaven's sake be still!"

"I do not mind if she does hear us."

"I do!"

The blind was drawn quietly down, and the sweet face disappeared.

"Good-night, Elise," said Sir Edmund, gently. "Go to bed, child, and forget me if you can!"

But Elise could not forget him. He should have taken a very different course with her if he desired that.

Young and romantic, this first fancy seemed to her a love which must last a lifetime. Flattered by his admiration, attracted by his manly beauty, her very youth, which had so far shielded her from men's attentions, now became her greatest

danger, and caused her to speak and act as she would have blushed to do had womanhood been more strongly developed in her.

Too young to care to hide her feelings behind a barrier of maidenly reserve, yet old enough to be carried completely away by a passionate longing to possess what she craved for at any price.

Taught a lot of sentimental nonsense by her Parisian schoolfellows, and unable to judge for herself the path of honour and the duties of life, Elise allowed her feelings to sway her actions, and instead of trying to forget him, she lay tossing restlessly on her bed, thinking of the man she supposed she loved; of his flattering words, of his clasping arms, and his passionate kisses. Was it likely such a girl as Elise would forget him!

She thought of him all through the night, only falling into restless slumber as the sun-god touched the heavens with his rosy hand, while Dorothy, with a murmured prayer for his happiness, slept as peacefully as an infant, and, awaking with the birds, like them sang, while she dreamed in a soft white costume, and was beside the river feeding her favourites by the time her lover looked out into the day and saw her there.

Her lover! Was he her lover!

She, at any rate, had no doubt upon the subject. Her faith in him would take a good deal of breaking and as yet she knew nothing.

How pure and child-like she looked, her garb as white as the swans themselves! A pang of deep remorse shot through the man's heart as he watched her.

He felt that this girl aroused the best part of his nature. Elise the worst. Yet even while he thought of her his pulses throbbed with the remembrance of their clandestine meeting.

Alas! stolen apples ever were the sweetest!

He dressed himself quickly, and coming up behind her over the mossy lawn, touched her lightly.

She started a little, but quickly hid the fact that he had startled her, and smiled.

"You are out early, Dora!"

"Yes, I like the morning air; it seems sweeter than any other time of day. I like you to call me Dora, because no one else does!" and she passed her hand confidently through his arm.

"That is right, sweetheart; I find it pleasant when you like what I do. I wonder what you would say, little Dora, if I did anything of which you disapproved greatly!"

"Not much, Edmund. The more I felt the less I should say, perhaps."

"Stern silence would be the hardest of all to bear, dearest!"

"Well, we need not settle how I should bear such a trial," she laughed. "I suppose you do not mean to behave very badly to me, do you, dear!"

"No, indeed, Dora; men seldom mean to do wrong, yet, somehow, I fear we often do it!"

She looked up at him with a bright glance of perfect confidence.

"I am not much afraid, Edmund. I am willing to trust my happiness in your hands."

He could not meet her gaze, but turned and caught roughly at a flower, and shattered it.

"Poor flower!" she said, as its leaves fell at their feet. "What has it done to vex you, Edmund!"

"It was wanton of me to destroy its beauty, was it not? We men are not too perfect, Dora; I know I am not. But a woman's love can work wonders, and perhaps my white dove may make something good of me yet, if only she will try. Dora, I feel that your influence over me is a holy one. Try and keep me straight!"

"I don't think it will need much effort on my part, Edmund. These faults are only visible to your own eyes."

"You do not know, Dora."

"Do I not! Then tell me, love."

"Tell you," he laughed, uneasily. "No, no, little one, I cannot scare you with harrowing details; but I have not always been quite so good as I might have been, I fear."

"Which of us have!"

"You, at any rate, Dora."

"Oh! I don't know about that! Our temptations may not have been of the same sort, but I have often done very wrong."

He smiled at her amusedly.

"Your blackest sin would be white compared to mine, Dora. We men don't live very good lives."

"Do not say that, dear!" she said, a look of pain crossing her sweet face. "If I could not believe in you I could believe in nothing. Oh! I hope I shall never have cause to doubt you, Edmund!" and she lifted her eyes full of undefined fear to his.

"Don't look like that, Dora; it makes me feel such a brute."

The shadow of pain vanished, and once more she smiled at him.

"What has made us drift into this sad talk, Edmund! Probable happiness would be pleasanter to contemplate than possible faults and misery. You will drive in the pony carriage with me to the Burnham Beeches to-day, will you not, dear? It only holds two, and it will be nice to be together."

"With all my heart. We will try and have a happy day."

"Have you noticed how lovely the vernal tints are here, Edmund! The trees seem a tenderer green by the river than inland, and how perfect these willows are, especially the weeping ones! Is not Riversdale a pretty place, with its jewelled lawns down to the water's edge? Yet, beautiful as it is now, when the floods are out it is a complete scene of wreck and desolation; the flowers are washed away, the shrubs are uprooted, and the overgrown river reaches right up through the meadows. It must be like a happy life into which some desolating care sweeps and drives all beauty from it."

"And at the worst you see the floods abate, and the refreshed land looks all the more green and beautiful the following spring."

"Yes, I suppose trouble does purify," she said, softly; "but I fancy the same flowers never bloom again, but are replaced by others to bring brightness. There are people who can be equally content with the new flowers if they are beautiful; but, Edmund, if the floods came and drowned the blossoms of my life's happiness I could never replace them or care for others."

Her words seemed to silence him, for he did not attempt to answer her, but he pressed the little hand which rested on his arm more closely; and the breakfast gong sounding, he led her towards the house.

"We were drifting into a melancholy sort of talk, sweetheart. We must try to live on high ground, where the floods cannot reach us."

Then he stooped and kissed her, and passed into the hall to hang up his hat, and Dorothy entered the room without him.

"And now for Elise," he said to himself, as he prepared to follow his fiancée. "Poor girl! I hope she is wiser this morning," and there was almost a nervous feeling about his heart, at the thought of meeting her again, a mistrust of her, and, if the truth must be told, of himself too.

It was a relief to him to find only Dorothy and her parents at the breakfast-table, for Elise was now asleep after her fitful, restless night.

CHAPTER III.

A PIC-NIC AT BURNHAM BEECHES.

THERE were carriages of all sorts, sizes, and shapes drawn up in the garden drive at Riversdale, and laughing faces by the score were in the drawing-room, and on the green lawn.

Hamper after hamper was carried out and placed in the big "brake" for the cold collation which the party were to partake of under the spreading branches of the beautiful old Burnham Beeches.

Among the carriages was Dorothy Dunraven's little village cart, in which she and Sir Edmund were to be "Darby and Joan" on the journey to the place of meeting.

Many of the guests had already driven off,

when Elise came out of the house, apparently in search of some one; and when her eye fell on Sir Edmund and her sister she joined them.

"Dorothy," she said, "mamma wants to know if you will go in the carriage with her!"

"No, dear, I am going in the pony cart with Sir Edmund."

"Well! you had better tell her so yourself; I am not going in again. I shall mount the 'drag.' Captain Radcliffe wants me to sit on the box seat with him, and I shall like it awfully. Perhaps he will teach me to handle the ribbons."

"Don't let the horses run away, Sister."

"Wouldn't it be fun if they did!" laughed the girl.

"It might not end in a joke, though. There mamma at the door. I will speak to her," and Dorothy left the two alone.

"Why did you not manage to go with me?" asked Elise sharply.

"My dear girl, the thing was impossible. Dora naturally expects me to accompany her."

Elise bit her nether lip and tapped her pretty foot impatiently on the ground.

"She shall not return with you," she muttered, under her breath.

"Did you speak?" he inquired, not catching her words.

"Yes, I did."

Her cheeks were flushed, her bright eyes flashing, and never had she looked so handsome.

Among the many elegant and becoming dresses which were grouped upon Mr. Dunraven's lawn, there was not a handsomer one than that worn by his young daughter Elise—a fact which he was not slow to notice.

"That girl knows how to dress!" he said, approvingly, to his wife.

"Worth knows how to dress her, certainly; the only fault I have to find with the costume is, that it makes her look too old."

"It's the girl, not the dress, my dear! Elise has grown quite a woman."

"A woman! Nonsense! She is barely fifteen!"

"Well! well! She is older than Dorothy now!"

"So she is in some ways!"

"I shall drive with Sir Edmund, mother dear; so I can't go with you to-day."

"So I suppose, my dear; but Elise would have it that you were coming in the carriage!"

"Elise! how very odd."

"Are you coming with me, Miss Elise?" asked Captain Radcliffe.

"I'll book the box seat for you both ways if you will honour me!"

"All right, do! I love being on a drag. And, Captain Radcliffe, will you teach me to drive?"

"By all means. Are you ready to start?"

"We shall look down on you, Sir Edmund," she laughed.

"Don't get in front, for I might not be able to manage the horses, and I might overturn you and Dorothy."

"I don't fancy you would mind doing it a bit, by the expression of your face!" he returned, laughing too.

"Shall I help you to your exalted position?"

"No, thanks; Captain Radcliffe can take care of me," and she gave him a look of mixed reproach and defiance.

"Take care of yourself, Elise," he said, softly.

"Why should I?" she replied, recklessly.

"There is no one to care if I break my neck."

"Elise!"

The tone of his voice was tender, and sent the blood to her cheek.

She turned from him and gave her hand to Captain Radcliffe, and sprang lightly up on to the box seat, and talked gaily to him while he gathered up the reins; and the rest of the party clambered to their places, and the drag moved off, the grooms running by the horses' sides till they were out of the grounds, and jumping up with the coach in motion with the agility of monkeys.

Sir Edmund gnawed his moustache with a preoccupied air as he watched them start, but Elise never once turned her head towards him.

"It is better so," he said to himself. "She will find it easy to forget and to console herself; but how lovely she looked! I suppose the man is in love with her. Well, I don't wonder

if he is; the girl has an especial charm of her own—hard to resist. If I had met her before Dorothy—"

"Oh! here you are, Dora! Are you ready to start?" and he turned to help her into the small vehicle.

Doubtless Dora's lover was thoroughly enjoying himself, but he was very silent, and his eyes wandered restlessly along the road in front of them, where the drag had halted for some purpose; and when they started again, just ahead of the pony carriage, Elise was in possession of the "ribbons."

The spirit of mischief seemed to have taken a strong hold of her, and Captain Radcliffe trembled for the safety of his carriage, his horses, and his own bones; but Elise was so charming, and seemed so pleased with herself, that he could not find it in his heart to depose her from her position of driver; and the horses, feeling a new and inexperienced hand over them, took liberties that they would not have presumed to take with their master.

"Good Heavens! Radcliffe must be mad to let that girl drive in such a reckless way," cried Sir Edmund, excitedly. "I wish we could overtake them and stop her from driving."

"Elise is very wilful; she would not give up the reins because you told her."

"I think she would!"

Dorothy looked at him in surprise.

"Are you really alarmed about Elise? I fear we can't expect poor little 'Puck' to overtake those four powerful steeds."

This she added, as Sir Edmund brought the whip sharply down the pony's side, when he was already trotting at his utmost pace.

"No, you are right," he said, mastering his impatience with an effort; "it is useless to try," and he drew Puck slightly in.

After a few minutes he remarked apologetically—

"I never could bear to see a woman in danger."

"I hope Elise is not really in danger," returned Dorothy, gently. "Captain Radcliffe is a splendid whip, and he would not, I think, let her get into trouble."

"Not if he could help it, of course, but Elise seems very headstrong; he might find it as difficult to govern her as she the horses."

They were out of sight now, and Sir Edmund was thinking of little else but Elise all the way.

He was very affectionate and attentive to Dorothy, but there was something wanting, and the drive did not prove as enjoyable a one as she had anticipated; yet she could not have told you what had been lacking.

Very eagerly did the Baronet glance round the corner as he turned in among the Burnham Beeches, and a sigh of relief escaped him when he saw Elise, with the captain by her side, seated on the grass chatting gaily.

But the satisfaction died out when he found that Elise took not the faintest notice of him, but seemed to be on the most friendly terms of easy intimacy with her soldier companion, and her silvery laughter was ringing out among the old beeches, rippling from bough to bough, followed by his deeper tones.

"Elise seems very happy," remarked Sir Edmund, somewhat sharply.

"Yes! She looks a woman; but she is a very child for enjoyment. She won't laugh like that five years hence."

"It is to be hoped not."

"Oh! I like to hear her cheerful. Trouble will come soon enough, and when once it touches her that childish laugh will be a thing of the past!"

"Did you ever laugh like that, Dora?" he inquired, with a smile.

"I! Oh, no! Elise has a much more sunny nature than mine. I think I have always been a quiet, uninteresting little creature, very much what I am now."

"Are you fishing, Dora?"

"Fishing! For what?"

"Compliments, to be sure!"

"Not I! I would sooner have a rude thing said to me than be paid a meaningless compliment. It is humiliating to think that a man

should suppose we women are so weak as to like them to talk such utter nonsense to us."

"I am not sure, Dora, that compliments are meaningless from most men. A few may make flattering speeches with no object, but more often it is their first step to win affection, love, admiration—something, at any rate, for themselves."

"I had not thought of it in that light."

"I dare say not. You do not know much of the world, darling! Many children are more up to its ways than you, I think."

"Do you mind, Edmund?" she asked, with a wistful look, turning her soft eyes to his, questioningly.

"No, little one. I like you to be innocent."

She nestled a little closer to his side.

"I can hardly boast of innocence, dear! Only ignorance, I fear."

"Well, it amounts to much the same thing. See, here comes the carriage. Shall I go and help your mother out?"

"Thank you, I will go with you!"

"So, here you are, Mrs. Dunraven, safe and sound. I hope we are to have some of the fun of spreading the luncheon; but I suppose your servants will be indignant if they are interfered with, though to my mind it is half the pleasure of a picnic."

"To be sure it is. The servants can do the things you won't like doing—unpack, wait on us, wash up, and pack again!"

"That is true. One feels lazy after a good feed, and washing up is a decided effort. Dorothy, you will come for a walk now, under the Beeches! And what time do you intend to lunch, Mrs. Dunraven?"

"Oh, about two o'clock, I think!"

"Very well! Then we will be back by one, and make ourselves useful."

And, lovers though they were, they were back, true to their word.

"Military punctuality! oh, Mrs. Dunraven!" said Sir Edmund, showing her his watch.

"Much more so than the military man's," she laughed. "Captain Radcliffe vowed he would be here to assist at a quarter before one, but he has not made his appearance yet!"

At her words the Baronet's eyes ran rapidly over such members of the party as were assembled there in groups of twos, threes, and fours, and a look of annoyance settled upon his face.

"We have brought some wreaths of eglantine to twine among things, mother," said Dorothy, holding up an armful of long sprays.

"Don't you think they will make a lovely garnish to the pie-dishes?"

"I'll tell you when I see them, my dear; and now, if you really wish to help, get on with your work, because, at present, you are only hindering the servants."

"Here is a nice smooth spot!" said Sir Edmund; "let us lay the cloth here. Yes! that is right! Wouldn't it be as well to cut this ham in slices, and not remove any till they are wanted; it would save time and trouble. I see the chickens are already divided, and all tied together with ribbon. The ox who had such a tongue as that, Dora, must have been a fine fellow! It is the biggest I ever saw! Now, here is a chance for you, little one! Here is a dish for you to garnish."

"What is it?"

"Oh, a pigeon-pie. Now for your wreath. Shall I hold it for you? If you don't keep it straight you will spill the gravy and spoil your dress. By the bye, white suits you, Dora?"

"I think it does most people."

"I am not so sure of that. Stout people, for instance, should never wear it. Let me fasten that for you. It really does look very nice, and, on the white cloth, it will show up better still. I'm glad you thought of it."

"Here come Elise and Captain Radcliffe!"

"So I see!" returned the Baronet, sharply.

And when the other two joined them, he took no notice whatever of the girl, but paid Dorothy the most marked care and attention.

More than once Elise paused to look at him in wonder.

"He cannot care for her like that, or he never would have acted as he did last night," she told



"HOW QUIET IT SEEMS, JUST AS IF YOU AND I WERE ALONE IN THE WORLD!" SAID EDMUND.

herself again and again, and her own mood grew fitful. At one moment she was silent and still, the next her laughter rang out feverishly, and she flirted in the most audacious manner. She mocked at poor Dorothy's egotism, and made game of everything she had done.

"Who will make the claret-cup!" inquired Mrs. Dunraven, coming to them with a loving-cup in her hand.

"Oh! Sir Edmund will," said Dorothy. "His is the best I ever tasted."

"I shall be happy, if it won't offend the butler," he laughed.

"I hope we consider our servants' comforts," said Mrs. Dunraven, "but we don't take any notice of their fancies. If they remain in our service they must like our ways. I don't see any reason for sacrificing one's self to one's servants!"

"You are quite right. They don't respect you any the more for it. Quite the reverse!"

"Is not this a pretty port wine jelly, with all this gold-leaf floating in it?" remarked Elise, holding up a shape to Sir Edmund Drake.

But, with a reply that he was no judge of cookery, he turned from her to admire the colouring of a cream, which was smothered in hundreds and hundreds of tiny balls of silver.

"Gold-leaf!" exclaimed Mr. Dunraven to his wife, "why, that is enough to poison anyone! Metal—pure metal! Desire the cook never to use it again!"

"The quantity used is so small it can't be very unwholesome, my dear," laughed Mrs. Dunraven; "and it settles towards the top of the shape; so if people don't like it, they can leave that part, you know."

"I am afraid there are not many things we should eat if we questioned whether each article of food had anything not quite wholesome in it," remarked Captain Radcliffe. "The best way is to shut your eyes, if you like the taste and ask no questions."

"Where is the brandy for the claret-cup, Dora?" called Sir Edmund.

"Oh! do you put brandy in it?" inquired Mrs. Dunraven.

"To be sure I do. It mellows it, and ensures its not disagreeing with you. I will warrant no one is ever the worse for my claret-cup. Will you slice some cucumber, Dorothy? I know you like to be useful. Yes, lemon, and sugar, and claret, and soda-water; that is right. I think we are all ready for the guests."

"And I am sure they are the same for you," returned Mr. Dunraven; "they are all as hungry as hunters. I hope we have plenty to eat!"

"He is always afraid on that score," said Mrs. Dunraven, with a smile.

"If we get through all this we shall do well," said Captain Radcliffe.

"Shall I carve that quarter of lamb, or shall I sound the assembly! I'll give them the right tune with the bugle call," and he made an excellent imitation of that brass instrument, which brought the laughing throng crowding around the "spread."

"Take your seats, ladies and gentlemen, and make yourselves at home," shouted Mr. Dunraven, good-humouredly. "This is Liberty Hall, you know—the blue arch of Heaven for our roof, and nature's carpet for our flooring!"

In a few minutes everyone was busy with knife, fork, and spoon. Champagne corks flew, the loving cup passed round, and spirits which were equable before now rose, till the quietest eyes had a sparkle in them, while the mischievous ones were fairly dancing.

"I am loyal," cried Mr. Dunraven. "Let us drink to the health of the Queen."

"I have another toast to propose," said Captain Radcliffe, leaning forward, glass in hand. "A little bird has whispered that we may offer our congratulations to a happy young couple present, and wish them a joyous future."

Sir Edmund looked annoyed, while Dorothy's colour deepened guiltily.

"You're in for it, Drake," laughed Mr. Dun-

raven good-humouredly. "Some one has spilled upon you, and you will have to return thanks."

But the Baronet took not the remotest notice of the toast; he merely nodded familiarly to his future father-in-law, and remarked, quietly,—

"The Queen is admissible, but no private questions, I think."

Then he smiled at Dorothy, and a somewhat awkward silence ensued.

"What an insufferable fellow Sir Edmund is!" whispered Captain Radcliffe to Elise. "I fear you will find him an uncomfortable brother-in-law."

"Who said he was to be my brother-in-law?" retorted the girl. "You did not hear it from me."

"That is true; and perhaps the report is incorrect. If that is the case, I am very sorry I should have made such a mistake."

He looked at her questioningly, but she was apparently engaged studying the pattern of her plate, and tracing it with one of the prongs of her fork.

"I wish you would tell me, Miss Elise, whether I have been misinformed! If so, I will apologise."

"By way of another toast!" she retorted, sarcastically.

"I did not say so. How have I offended you, Miss Dunraven? We were very good friends just now."

"I am not Miss Dunraven."

"Miss Elise, then! Come, now, is Sir Edmund engaged to your sister?"

"I am not in his confidence, Captain Radcliffe. If you want to know, you had better ask him yourself."

He laughed.

"I fear the handsome Baronet is no favourite of yours, Miss Elise, so we will drop him. Let us make a party and go for a walk. I'll take you to see the new Peak drive, which, by the bye, is not to my mind an improvement to the place. However, it is useful."

(Continued on page 41.)



THERE WAS A CRASH OF SPYLINTERING WOOD, A OY, AND CLARICE FELT HERSELF FALLING INTO ICE-COLD WATER.

FOR LOVE'S SWEET SAKE.

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CHAPTER XVI.

LOVED AND LOST.

LENNOX CRAVEN, dusty and travel-stained, stood on the threshold, and a moment later, Clarice, utterly oblivious of Paice's presence, had thrown herself in his arms.

"You have come just when I needed you most!" she exclaimed. "Now you will explain everything, and show that though circumstances have conspired against you, you are still not the villain they would make you out to be."

He did not return her caress, but put her gently from him, and closed the door. His quick glance travelled from his wife to Paice, and then back again, and it is likely enough that he instantly comprehended the situation.

"You have been to Florence?" he said to the detective in those quick incisive tones of his that always compelled attention.

"Yes, sir, and I was telling Mrs. Craven what I found out there. I dare say you can guess what it was."

"I dare say I can," was the quiet reply. "Well, you have probably done your duty, and that is more than we all can say. But now, if you will be kind enough to leave us for a little while, I will confer with my wife, and see you later on."

The detective seemed to hesitate.

"I should like you to understand, Mr. Craven, that I have been acting entirely in a business capacity, and that in spite of everything I have no feeling against you."

Craven waved his hand impatiently.

"My good fellow, I am sure you have acted according to your lights, and there is no prejudice on either side. All I ask you is to keep a quiet tongue in your head for half an hour, and then I will see you, and we will do our best to arrange matters."

Paice went out, and as the door closed behind him, Lennox faced his wife. He was unusually pale and even stern, but there was a curious humility in his voice as he addressed her.

"Clarice, that man has been telling you that it was I who bought those two swords in Florence, and on that he has built up a certain theory. Am I right?"

She bowed her head without speaking. Something in his tone, as well as in his manner, made her heart sink still lower, now that the first rapture of seeing him had passed away. She watched him anxiously, as he remained opposite her, his eyes fixed on the ground. A deep sigh broke from his lips, and approaching nearer, he knelt at her feet, and held her hand against his heart.

"Well, dearest, we have tasted the best of life, let what will befall us now—we have loved, even if we have to lose. Nothing can take from us the memory of what has been."

"Lennox, what do you mean, why do you speak in this tone—what has happened to you?"

"I have just come from Parser's death-bed—my poor old devoted friend, whose life was sacrificed in doing my bidding. It has saddened me, and made me see how headstrong and selfish I have been—how imperiously I have swept obstacles on one side when they threatened to interfere with my happiness—in a word, how I have been ready to sacrifice any and everything in my overwhelming passion for you. I don't think I ever realised it before I saw the faithful old fellow's eyes glazed in death, and his poor maimed limbs." A convulsive shudder shook Craven's strong frame, and he rose to his feet, pressing his hand across his eyes as if to shut out some terrible haunting spectacle. For the first time in his life he was thoroughly unstrung. The result may have been partly owing to fatigue and want of food and sleep, but it was also partly due to the remorse that had come over him during poor Parser's death agonies. It is true he was neither morally or legally responsible for the accident that had befallen the

man, but he could not forget that, but for him, it would not have happened.

"Then," said Clarice, slowly, "Paice was right in guessing that you had sent Parser to bribe the Florentine shopkeeper not to betray you?"

Craven made no reply, but sank on a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"Lennox!" she continued, vehemently, "why are you not open with me; why do you, by your manner, encourage those horrible suspicions that Paice has of you? I know for a certainty that you were at Sunningdale Court on the night of my father's murder, but surely you can explain why you were there—you can assure me that you had no cause of enmity against him, no desire for his death—"

A groan escaped his lips. How could he tell her this, when, in cold blood, he had gone to Sunningdale with the resolve to kill Sir Alrick Chandos, albeit in fair fight.

"And suppose I cannot give you this assurance, suppose I told you that your father had done me a deadly injury, and I felt it my bounden duty to avenge it—could you forgive me, Clarice, for the sake of the love I bear you?" he said, his voice low and strained, while he held out his hands towards her.

Involuntarily she drew back, her eyes full of horror.

"Forgive you—love you when there is the stain of blood between us—a father's blood! Great Heavens, are you mad to ask such a question?" Then the full meaning of his demand flashed upon her, and with a tortured cry of extremest pain she fell on the couch, burying her face in the cushions to hide its white anguish from him. Paice was right then—her own husband was her father's murderer!

Lennox came across to the couch and bent over her in agonised pleading.

"Clarice, let me acknowledge everything, and then you will be able to judge how far I was to blame. That I have sinned I know. That I ought never to have crossed your path I know

also, but how can I tell you the depth of my temptation—the insane love that came upon me like the madness of a fever that day we met at Fairfax Park, and that grew in intensity each time I saw you? Even to myself I cannot explain it. You were the one woman in the world forbidden me, and you were the only one in the world I wanted. The tragedy of it is appalling. And yet my love was so great that it trampled every obstacle under foot. I was determined you should be mine, and my determination wrought its own fulfilment."

Even now there was a ring of stern triumph in his voice, as if the consciousness of his victory still afforded him a certain gratification. But in Clarice it awoke a far different feeling.

"And I—what consideration did you show for me?" she asked, without looking at him.

"I resolved to dedicate my life to the task of making you happy. I forgot that man is the slave, not the master of circumstance, and I thought that love like ours could overleap even such a barrier as divided us. You say I was wrong, Clarice!"

"His voice was very wistful, but she steered herself against it.

She looked up and confronted him now, pale, and accusing. A change had come over her face, making it almost haggard in spite of its youthfulness.

"You were more than wrong, Lennox—you were wicked and cruel—cruel to make me love you when you know there was a gulf between us that could never be overstepped. I do not wish to hear your story; whether you had any just cause for grievance against my poor father I do not know, and it does not matter, for nothing could alter the fact that his blood lies between us, to separate us as long as we live."

"Clarice!" His face was deadly pale, his voice hardly rose above a whisper, "What do you mean?"

"I mean exactly what I say, Lennox, that in future we must be strangers to each other."

The blood seemed to recede from her heart as she spoke the words, but her voice never quavered. He gazed at her in stupefaction.

"Strangers—you and I! After the vows we swore at the altar, after the happiness we have had together! Great Heavens! You are not in earnest."

"I am in most sad and sorrowful earnest. What else is there left for us to do! We could never be to each other what we have been. Every time my eyes rested on your face I should see my father's accusing eyes, every time I heard your voice his denunciations would ring in my ears—I might grow to hate you."

Her voice fell to a low, sibilant whisper, that seemed to Lennox like the hiss of a serpent. A groan escaped his lips.

"This is worse than anything I dreamed of even in my darkest hours," he muttered. "You are cruel to me, Clarice."

"If I am cruel to you I am cruel to myself. But it is not cruelty, it is justice."

"I suppose it is, the justice that hangs the criminal before a trial," was his bitter retort.

"What need is there for a trial when the criminal has confessed!" she asked, sadly. Then she clasped her hands together vehemently, "Nothing but your own words would have made me believe you guilty, Lennox—no, not the evidence of all the world if you had sworn to me that you were innocent. It is out of your own mouth that you stand condemned. Even when Pales told me all he had found out, and I myself was able to supply the missing links of evidence—when I remembered finding my father's revolver in your possession, and the conviction forced itself upon me that it was you who reaped me on the night of his death, even then I felt sure there was some way out of the mystery, some loophole that Pales had passed by, some explanation that you would be able to give, showing that you were innocent in thought and deed. But your words leave me no alternative."

"And on them you banish me? Ah, Clarice, you loved the dead better than you love the living! If you cared for me, as I cared for you,

you would let everything else go except our love."

Often, in these days that followed, he thought of her as she stood before him then, when she gave her answer, pale as some tall white lily, but with a look of mingled agony and high resolve on her face that reminded him of a pictured Christian martyr.

"You make my task harder for me than it need be, Lennox. Oh, my love, my love," in a sudden burst of anguish, "don't you see that it is because I love you so that we must part? Love should purify and ennoble, not degrade and sully, and if I stayed with you now where would be its nobility? I should be giving way to that baser part of it which is called passion, and I should be lowered in my own eyes and in yours. Is it not better that we should separate now while we still have the memory of what has been, pure and sweet, a memory that will be with us till death itself? It is what you, yourself, said when you first came in—'nothing can take from us the memory of what has been!'"

He bowed his head. Yes, he had said that when he entered the room half-an-hour ago, filled with a dire presentiment of coming woe and melancholy, with the recollection of his servant's death-bed. He had been conscience-stricken, too, as, indeed, he was now. After all, Clarice was right. There could be no happiness for them in a future, shadowed by Sir Alrick's murder.

In his selfish passion, when the sight of Clarice's beauty had set his soul on fire, he had told himself that the sins of the father had nothing to do with the children; but now he found out his error—now when it was too late!

"If you had only done as I wished you—sent Pales away on that accursed afternoon that first brought him here!" he cried out, striking the table with his clenched hand.

She shook her head.

"It would have made no difference in the end. Sooner or later, my old resolve to bring the murderer to justice would have awoke, and I should never have rested until I had achieved it. I know my own nature better than you do. For a time the fire slumbered, but it was not dead—it only needed a touch to rekindle the flame. In any case I should have gone on to the bitter end, as I swore over my father's dead body I would do."

There was silence. Husband and wife stood facing each other, only a few feet of actual earth dividing them, but as far apart in reality as though oceans had rolled between.

They both recognised this. Lennox, for all his iron will and obstinate determination, knew that nothing he could urge would change his wife's resolve—knew, too, that the sacrifice she was making was bitterer than death, and, moreover, that she was right!

"Then it is good-bye, Clarice!"

"Good-bye—for ever."

He bowed his head and turned away. He could not speak; he dared not touch her lips, or even her hand, lest the passion within him should escape his control, and make one more wild effort to sweep her will, and his own conscience before it. He knew this was the inevitable fiat—indeed, it seemed to him now that he had known it from the beginning.

And as he went he thought of Adam and Eve driven from the flame-guarded gates of Paradise, by the sword of the great angel.

"But they were happy," he muttered to himself, with a miserable smile, "for at least they were together!"

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTERWARDS!

FOR some time after she was left alone Clarice remained in a sort of stupor, sitting straight and upright on the couch, gazing with unseeing eyes at the fair expanse of lawn and garden where she and her husband had been so happy. Yes, happy, in spite of the secret whose shadow had lain upon them from the very first. Her mind, flashing over the past, and calling it before her eyes in a quick series of mental pictures, brought

before her the different occasions on which she had instinctively felt that Lennox was fighting against some inexorable destiny, which he nevertheless feared might in the end overcome him. Doubtless his interview with the mysterious woman in Grey Friars had had something to do with his crime, though Clarice could not even yet guess the identity of the woman. But it did not interest her much now—what did it matter—what, indeed, did anything matter now that she and the man she loved better than her own life, but, thank Heaven, not better than her conscience—were for ever put asunder!

Her miserable musings were interrupted by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Pales. The young wife started violently—she had entirely forgotten his existence.

"I am awaiting your instructions, ma'am," he said, in a subdued voice, for the white misery in her face touched him to sympathy, still, as he remarked afterwards, "business is business."

With an effort, she brought back her wandering thoughts, and concentrated them on the present moment, then she rose, and filled in a blank cheque which she happened to have in her purse.

"Take this money, Mr. Pales, and consider our business relations closed. I need hardly remind you of the necessity of keeping your own counsel."

The detective glanced at the figure—which represented two hundred pounds—and carefully put away the slip of paper in his pocket-book.

"I suppose, ma'am, you mean you don't want me to make any further inquiries?"

"No, I want the matter to drop. I am doing no one an injustice in hushing it up—it is a private, not a public affair, and the decision rests entirely with me. You have done your best in obedience to my wishes, and I am obliged to you. There is no more to be said."

She turned away with a little weary gesture that was curiously pathetic. Pales, accepting the hint of departure, laid his hand on the door and paused for a moment to say a few concluding words.

"Very well, Mrs. Craven, I shall obey you implicitly, but if anything new should turn up, or you should require my services in any other way, I shall be always at your command."

He bowed and passed out, and hardly had he disappeared before Sybil Marsh came in, half hesitatingly.

"Clarice, what has happened! I have just seen Mr. Craven tearing out of the house like a madman, and, of course, it is easy to guess something is the matter. If you prefer not telling me what it is, I will curb my curiosity; but if on the other hand I can be of any use to you, I should like to know."

"It is only this, Sybil, that my husband and I are going to live apart for some time—in fact, for ever. I owe you so much explanation as you are our guest, and an old friend, but I cannot tell you more—either now or in the future."

Naturally Sybil was astonished. For a few minutes she did not speak, then she came over to Clarice's side, and touched her arm, with a strange softness and humility.

"I do not wish to know more. I see that you are unhappy, and I feel that neither I nor anyone else can console you, only—all you accept my sympathy, and will you let me stay with you, taking off your shoulders all household burdens, and giving you all the aid in my power? It may not be much, but at least we are bound together by the links of many kindnesses on your part, which I will now do my best to repay."

Clarice accepted her offer gratefully. It is true, in the old days, she had not been very much attached to Sybil, but of late she had grown to like her better, and, at any rate, she would be someone to speak to in the dreary time that loomed before her. So it was arranged that her visit should be indefinitely prolonged, and the household settled down into its ordinary routine. Of course, it speedily became known among the servants that some rupture had occurred between the master and mistress, but though many surmises were hazarded as to its nature, the truth was not guessed, and it was supposed the separation between the newly-married pair had its

origin in jealousy, and that in time it would blow over, and Craven would return.

His personal belongings had been packed up by the butler, and sent to his club in town. Clarice had also received a visit from Mr. Marlowe, who acted as his solicitor, and whom he had deputed to manage all business affairs, and do what he could for the young wife in his absence. Every arrangement had been made for her comfort and convenience, and it was decided that she should stay on at Hurst Royal for the present, at least.

"Your husband has made a deed of gift, settling the place on you," said the solicitor, who was evidently much interested by the beauty of his young client, "and he desired me to carry out any wishes you might express. I dare say he has told you his intention of starting almost immediately on an expedition into Central Africa—or, if he has not done so, the papers have."

Clarice bowed without speaking. It was now nearly a month since she and Lennox parted, and she was beginning to realize what the separation meant to her. He had not written, but she had constant evidence of his care and forethought on her behalf, and of late the press had been full of his forthcoming journey.

"He expects to be away two years," went on Mr. Marlowe, "but it is quite possible his absence may be extended to three or even four years. He asked me to ascertain what your plans were, and then write and tell him."

"My plans are to remain here altogether. The house is quiet and retired. I don't know many people so I am not troubled by visitors, and I don't think I could find any other place to suit me better," returned Clarice.

"Mr. Craven hinted that perhaps you might like to spend some time at Sunningdale Court, and he asked me to strongly advise against such a course."

She shivered involuntarily.

"Tell him I am not at all likely to go there—the place has too many painful associations for me."

Her interview with the lawyer did not last much longer, and Mr. Marlowe bowed himself out. As he crossed the hall, one of the doors was suddenly opened, and Miss Marsh looked through, but almost immediately, it was closed again, and the lawyer who had caught only the most momentary glimpse of her, found himself puzzled at the vague sense of familiarity that transient glance had awoke within him. It was not until he was in his dog-cart driving away, that the solution of the enigma flashed across him.

"It was the lady who came to my office, and refused to give her name—the lady who was so anxious to know how the law directs an estate shall be inherited when the last owner left no will," he said to himself. "She was rather a striking person, with abilities somewhat out of the common, and it struck me at the time that she was working out some clever little game of her own. Now I wonder what the game is!"

The uneventful days passed by. Clarice rarely left her own grounds, and refused to see any callers; she lived indeed the life of a hermit. The newspapers told her that Lennox had left England, and then a deeper despondency seemed to fall on her. So long as she knew he was within call of a letter or telegram their parting had not the same hopeless finality about it, but now he was on his way to Africa—the Dark Continent that swallows up so many noble lives—and it seemed to her their chance of meeting on this side the grave was for ever gone. Sybil professed to be distressed at her pallor and falling appetite; but Clarice laughed at her apprehensions.

"I shall be better presently, when the cold weather comes," she said. "Autumn is always trying to people who are not very strong. By the way, did I tell you I had a letter from my Aunt Lady Fairfax, this morning?"

"You did not tell me, but I saw the envelope and recognized the writing."

"She informs me she and Jack are going to the south of France for the winter, and she is very anxious I should accompany them."

Sybil caught her breath sharply, and looked down to conceal her face.

"Shall you do so?"

"No. My aunt is a society woman, and is never happy unless she is in the midst of gaiety and dissipation, and that would not suit me at all. So I have just written to decline her invitation."

Sybil breathed more freely. There was a subdued exultation in her eyes that Clarice was too preoccupied to observe—indeed, if she had observed it, it would have told her nothing.

"How odd it seems, Clarice—you and I will be alone in England this winter, without a single relation to interfere with our liberty of action. We shall indeed be two emancipated young women."

"Have you no relations then, either?" asked Clarice, with listless curiosity.

"None in this country. My mother was an Italian, and I believe most of her people emigrated to America soon after I was born. I know nothing of them. They have never seen me, and for that reason take no interest in me."

"Then where did you live before you came as companion to me at Sunningdale Court?"

"I was in a boarding-school, first of all as pupil and afterwards as teacher. Oh, it was a horrible life—so drearily monotonous, so hopeless! I used to envy even the factory girls I saw come strolling along the street at the dinner hour, for at least they had liberty, and could sing and laugh, and go where they would, while I was a mere machine, hired to teach a set of stupid girls how to spell and parse. I stayed there till I was twenty-four, wasting some of the very best years of my life—years that can never come back again, alas! I am twenty-six now, but there are times when I feel as if I had lived centuries of misery and oppression! You who have been cradled in the lap of luxury, don't know what such a life as mine was like—the slightest I had to endure, the taunts as to my poverty, my friendlessness—the desolation of it. No wonder I grew hard and callous, and wishful to revenge my wrongs—"

She stopped herself in the flood of wild words that seemed to pour from her without her own volition. For once she had let fall the mask of reserve behind which she usually concealed her feelings, and the real creature, passionate, impulsive as women of Italian origin so often are, leapt to the surface.

"Poor Sybil!" murmured Clarice, compassionately, "you really have something to complain of, I think. But your mother and father—what had become of them?"

"They died when I was very young, and your father, Sir Alrick Chandor, who had known them both, put me to school, and paid for my education, then, as you know, he later on had me to live at Sunningdale with you. He was very kind to me, I ought to be grateful to him—I hope I am."

She walked to the window and looked out. It was a melancholy afternoon in late October; the lawn was strewn with yellow leaves, and the broken twigs of trees that had come down in last night's gale, the dahlias and sunflowers hung limp and drooping; on one of the half-bare branches a robin was singing a sweet and tender little lull that sounded like a lament for the dead summer.

"It is not very tempting weather; all the same you ought to go for a walk, Clarice," she said, without looking round.

"I suppose I ought," returned Clarice, listlessly, but she made no effort to move from where she sat watching the flames of the log fire reflecting themselves in the bright steel of the grate.

"You will get so dull and moping if you stay indoors. I'll go and fetch your walking things down for you, and then you'll have no excuse for not starting," and before Clarice could remonstrate, she had slipped from the room, presently returning with her own outdoor garments and with a fur-lined cape and felt hat in her hands.

"You look after me very well, Sybil. I don't know why you should be so kind to me," the young wife murmured, as she allowed herself to be dressed, with a certain passive obedience that sat upon her rather strangely; for Clarice had

always been too spirited to let herself be waited on, much preferring to do things for herself.

Outside, the air was soft and warm for all the blustrous wind, and the clouds seemed to have blown away. It is true there was no sunshine, and the odour of rotting leaves mingled with the more pungent smell of burning weeds, still Clarice felt glad she had allowed herself to be persuaded to come out; for, although the melancholy that had settled on her did not altogether lift, she felt fresher and less depressed than when she was indoors.

"You have been for a walk before to-day, have you not?" she asked her companion.

"Yes, I went to the Black Torrent this morning; it was really worth seeing. The river is swollen from all the rain we have been having lately, and it was quite grand as it dashed over the stones under the Lovers' Bridge. We'll go there, and you'll see."

They walked along briskly until they came to a turning that branched off towards the village. There Sybil paused.

"Do you mind going on a little way by yourself, while I get a postal-order that I want, rather particularly, to send away to-night? If you cross the torrent at the Lovers' Bridge, I'll cross by the village bridge, below the falls, and then meet you on the other side, and we'll return home by another route."

Clarice nodded assent, and the two separated. It was about half-a-mile further on to the Lovers' Bridge—a well-known trysting-place, crossing a rapid stream which, in summer placid enough, was now a rough and turbid mountain torrent, dashing into seething spray over the great boulders that lay in its way.

Clarice stood for a few minutes to look at the contrast between the muddy darkness of the water and the creamy froth of the foam it churned round the stones. Running water had for her, as indeed it has for most people, a charm, and the spot where she now stood was so lonely that she had no fear of observation.

There were thick plantations of trees on either side; high up in a beech a squirrel was watching her with bright inquisitive eyes; a little further away a jay was uttering its strident note; but for the rest nothing broke the silence except the rushing of the stream.

The bridge had formerly been a pretty rustic erection, but wind and weather had had their will over it, and now it was to most tumble-down condition, the railing being partially a wreck, while the planks themselves seemed in the last stage of decay. Clarice looked at it and hesitated.

"It must be all right," she said to herself, reassuringly, "Sybil crossed it this morning, and a few hours would hardly make much difference to it."

She gathered her skirt round her ankles, and stepped on the bridge, holding the railing until she came to where it had entirely broken away. For a yard or four feet she would have nothing to hold by, still the planks had not been slippery thus far, and she was tolerably sure-footed, so the difficulties did not daunt her, although once she caught herself shivering as she glanced at the rushing torrent below, and thought of the falls towards which it was sweeping.

She had a passing inclination to turn back, but conquered it as being cowardly, and determined to keep on.

She took a step or two, and then paused indecisively. The planks seemed to sway under her feet; there was a crash of splintering wood, a cry, and she felt herself falling, falling until thought and feeling were both merged in the shock of plunging into ice-cold water.

For the bridge had given way as she trod on it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THIN BLUE LINE.

CLARICE'S position was one of extreme peril. She could not swim, and even if she had been an expert swimmer her strength would not have availed to keep her afloat against the force of the volume of water that was now bearing her

onwards towards the weir. She had sent forth one desperate cry as she felt herself falling, but in such a secluded spot it was most unlikely it would be heard or that help would be forthcoming. Once she neared the rapids she knew there would be no hope for her.

All these ideas flashed with lightning swiftness through her brain, but with them came a sense of her own powerlessness. She could do absolutely nothing, she was as helpless as a little child. A blind despair seized her, a sickening sense that death was upon her. Often and often, in her misery, she had told herself that she would be glad to die, but now that the grim fate actually touched her she drew back trembling, all the warm, young blood in her veins rising up in rebellion against the horror of the fate threatening her.

She could not count the time, already it seemed hours, instead of seconds, since she fell in the water. The noise of it deafened her, its muddy taste was in her mouth, her throat, her nostrils, choking, suffocating, and the more she struggled the more hopeless her situation became. She had a hazy idea that some one was shouting to her from the bank, but what was said she did not know, neither could she recognize the voice. Then all was blank darkness. Unconsciousness fell upon her and she knew no more.

When she came to herself again it was with a sensation of horrible pain, and not for some minutes afterwards did she even partially realize what had happened. Then, out of the misty haze, the anxious face of Sybil Marsh detached itself, and she became aware that the girl had been trying to bring her back to life by exercising artificial respiration. At the same time she fancied there was another person near, a presence, that in some indefinable fashion affected her very powerfully, and in a way she could not analyze. She was too weak to look round, or even to speak, but she waited with a strange tension of expectation for the sound of a voice whose echoes seemed still to be ringing in her ears.

She waited in vain, and at last murmured Sybil's name.

"Thank Heaven you are alive!" exclaimed Sybil, letting her tired arms fall to her side. "I was afraid I was too late. You have had a very narrow shave, but I think you have turned the corner now."

"You mean I was nearly drowned?"

"As nearly as possible. I was only just in time."

"It was you who saved my life, then?"

"Well, I contrived to drag you out of the water, if that is what you mean?"

"But who was the other person?"

"What other person? There is no one here but myself."

"Surely there was a second only a very little while ago? I am sure I heard a voice that was not yours."

Sybil laughed as she supported Clarice into a sitting posture, and wrung the wet from her loosened hair.

"No one but a boy, whom I have sent for a carriage and hot blankets. I gave him half-a-crown, and told him to run for all he was worth to the inn in the village, as that is the nearest house I can think of. I hope he'll be quick, for the sooner you are at home and in bed the better. How do you feel now?"

"Rather limp and dizzy," was Clarice's reply, and she closed her eyes with a strange feeling of drowsiness and an evident disinclination to say more. As a matter of fact she was conscious of acute disappointment. The voice she fancied she had heard must have existed only in her dreams. It was not the voice of her husband, and yet there was a ring of his tones in it, and it seemed to bring him nearer. Clarice's explanation of the matter was confusing even to herself, but she had an uncomfortable feeling of having missed something that might have been of importance—something, however, so elusive that even her imagination failed to grasp it.

A little while later the carriage arrived and she was taken home, where she found more hot blankets awaiting her—for Sybil's boy messenger

seemed to have done his errand well, and, after ordering the carriage at the inn, had gone on to Hurst Royal to apprise the household of the accident that had happened.

"It is not necessary to have a doctor," Sybil said to the housekeeper; "I can manage quite well alone—besides, it will be better to keep the matter as quiet as we can."

Her significant tone made the woman look up in awed curiosity.

"Good gracious, miss! is it true, then, that the accident wasn't an accident—that Mrs. Craven tried to—"

A warning finger uplifted stopped her.

"Hush! What you were going to say must remain unspoken. If there is any tittle-tattle amongst the servants, for goodness sake try to stop it. I would not let the scandal get about for anything."

And yet, it was precisely the scandal that did get about. The next morning all the village whispered it, and in the evening it was spoken of openly—Mrs. Craven, in desperation at her husband's desertion, had tried to commit suicide.

Happily Clarice herself never suspected of what she was accused. She kept her bed for some days, her nervous system apparently quite prostrated by the shock, and when she came downstairs she was still weak and ill, and seemed to have lost all powers of recuperation. Sybil did everything she could for her, and was constantly dosing her with jellies, port wine, and beef-tea, but they seemed to do her little good.

"I am a mystery to myself," she said one evening, about five weeks after her accident, as she sat in the morning-room, close to the fire; "I have lost all my old spirit, and it is not for want of effort either. I try all I can to put away miserable thoughts; I try to summon up my former resolution, but it is no good. There is a horrible physical lassitude upon me, which saps my energies at their springs."

"You will be better in a day or two," Sybil said, consolingly.

Clarice made a slightly impatient movement. "You have told me that every day regularly for the last fortnight, and each day I grow worse. You are not a true prophet, Sybil."

Sybil's lips quivered, as if with distress.

"I wish I could do more for you, dear," she cooed, in her low contralto voice; "you know how gladly I would make any sacrifice for your restoration to health. But what can I do?"

"Nothing more than you have done already," returned Clarice, remorseful at what looked like ingratitude on her part.

"And you are in no pain?"

"Not positive pain, only sometimes a deadly feeling of sickness comes over me—a horrible nausea such as I have never felt in my life before, and which leaves me faint and dizzy. There must be some reason for it." The last words were spoken in a low murmur, half to herself, and were unheard by Sybil, who was standing near the window, looking out into the dim December twilight, almost as if she were oblivious of the young wife's presence.

Just then a low and peculiar whistle came from without, and a quick flush leapt to the elder woman's cheek. She glanced round stealthily to make sure that Clarice had not noticed it, and then caught up a shawl, which chanced to be lying on a chair near.

"I am going outside for my usual little constitutional on the terrace," she said. "You won't mind being left alone for a few minutes?"

Clarice answered in the negative—indeed, she was glad of the opportunity, for it was a subject for complaint with her that she never had a minute to herself now. Morning, noon, and night, Sybil was with her, and she hardly ever saw other members of the household. It had lately struck her that, whenever she met any of the servants, they looked at her in rather a peculiar manner, almost as if they feared her, and made all haste to get away. She wondered why it was, and as she lay back in her chair, her eyes half closed, she was thinking to herself how entirely, since her accident, the reins of household government had slipped from her hands into those of Sybil Marsh, who was now to all intents and purposes mistress of Hurst Royal. From

this point her mind naturally went back to the accident itself, which was a puzzle she had never quite solved. It seemed so strange that Sybil should have crossed the bridge in the morning, and noticed nothing wrong about it, while a few hours later the planks had given way under a much lighter weight.

The room was in semi-obscurity, lighted only by the red glow of the fire, which had sunk down to an incandescent mass of crimson. Outside the early December dusk had fallen. Clarice sat with her back to the window by which Sybil had made her exit, and which she had carefully closed behind her. Quite suddenly the young wife was conscious of a chill, as if a cold wind had struck her, and at the same moment she felt that she was not alone. Another presence, which affected her in a strangely magnetic way had silently entered the room, and was now close beside her.

She had the impulse to turn hastily round and confront it, but her limbs refused to obey her will. Strange as it may appear, she was absolutely incapable of stirring. It seemed as if a spell had been laid upon her, which numbed her faculties, and held her prisoner to her chair, leaving her mind, however, perfectly free and clear.

How long she remained thus she could not afterwards tell, nor could she say with certainty whether the words that presently seemed to come to her from a long way off were uttered by a real voice, or whether they simply existed in her consciousness.

"Take up the mirror that lies on the table at your side, and hold it up to your face."

Mechanically she obeyed, and it flashed across her that if there really was someone behind her, she would see the face reflected in the little silver looking-glass as she held it. But in this she was mistaken. The only image given back was that of her own pale features.

"Lower the glass until it is level with your lips," commanded the voice, which still seemed to reach her through a haze.

She did so, and a pale yellow light sprang up, focusing itself on the mirror, and bringing her features into bold relief. For the first time she noticed the peculiar change that had lately taken place in her appearance. Her mouth, instead of being dewily red, like the cleft heart of a pomegranate, as it used to be, was now quite blue.

"Open your lips, and pull the lower one down, so as to expose your teeth."

With the same automatic action, she obeyed once more, and then she saw a thin blue line extending horizontally along the gums, exactly matching in hue the peculiar tint of her lips. The colour was so ghastly, and so unusual, that she could not forbear a shudder.

"That will do," said the voice, and the yellow light faded away; then, as suddenly as it had been laid upon her, the spell seemed broken. She recovered her volition, and letting the mirror drop on the fender, where it was shivered into a hundred fragments, she sprang to her feet, and turned round, half triumphant at the sensation of being once more mistress of herself, half terrified as to what might meet her gaze in the dim twilight.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1946. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

THE Russian embassy building in Berlin is a palace in dimensions and furnishings, and is in the principal street, Unter den Linden. It must have cost at least £800,000. The offices of the United States embassy are in marked contrast. They are on a third-class business street, in the midst of small stores. In the basement is a barber's shop, on the first floor a wine and schnapps saloon, and above the embassy offices are public lodging-rooms.

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A DISLOYAL LOVE.

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(Continued from page 36.)

Elise sprang to her feet, and invited several young people to join them for a stroll, and away went the merry crew under the shade of the lovely beeches.

"It is a charming place for a picnic, Miss Elise," said the Captain; "and for a walk too." "Yes, if people get rightly paired. It would be rather a nuisance, for instance, to find oneself in for a tête-à-tête with a fat old alderman, and to know that the man you wished to walk with had been given to his wife."

"Perhaps you would prefer that even to his being given to some pretty girl."

"Perhaps I should, if I were selfish."

"We are all selfish where our affections are concerned. There never was love without jealousy yet."

"But jealousy is a horrible thing, and leads people to commit all sorts of shocking acts."

"It does. But the seeds of it are in every heart where love exists."

"That is when people can't trust each other."

"Not a bit of it. You may have confidence in the truth of the person you love, and yet may dislike to see them care, in ever such an innocent fashion, for someone else. There are so many sorts of affections, you see."

"I had no idea you went in for being an oracle," said Elise, cynically.

"Nor had I; your remarks called mine out. Let me see, how did it all begin? You didn't wish to be paired off with an alderman. I hope it is not quite so bad as all that, Miss Elise. Personally, I am quite satisfied."

"That is fortunate; for we can easily change partners, you see."

"Who would you have had instead of me, Sir Edmund?"

"I shouldn't mind."

He looked at her critically.

"You must either like or dislike that man very much."

"Then say that I dislike him, what then?" she returned, defiantly.

"Then I should be very glad, and I should ask you not to like anyone at present."

"Why not at present?"

"My dear girl, you are at school now, are you not?"

"What if I am! Need that prevent my having feelings?"

"Don't be cross, Elise. In a couple of years' time you will understand me better, perhaps."

"I don't wish to understand you either now or then," she answered, crossly; and calling a girl-friend to her side, she passed her hand through her arm, and kept her there.

The sun was setting.

A gipsy camp had been prepared for tea, and now that delight was over, and all the guests had assembled at the appointed meeting-place, except Elise Dunraven, Captain Radcliffe, and the party who had gone out with them.

Carriages were waiting, and horses impatiently pawing the ground.

"What has become of Elise?" called Mr. Dunraven to Dorothy.

"Eight of them went off for a walk, papa, and they have not yet returned."

"Well, there are enough of them to take care of each other. We need not wait, mamma. Radcliffe can bring them all home in his drag. Dorothy, you will return as you came, I suppose?"

"Yes, papa!" she replied, with a happy smile.

And so the carriages were filled, and one by one drove off, till only two remained—the drag and the village cart.

"Shall we go, or wait for them, Edmund?" asked Dorothy of her silent lover.

"You cannot with propriety leave your young sister," he returned, irritably. "I can't think why Radcliffe cannot be punctual as well as the rest of the party!"

"It is not all Captain Radcliffe's fault. There

are seven other delinquents; but, Edmund, I don't think you like the gallant Captain; you certainly are down upon him."

"I don't know about being down upon him; the man is a puppy, and an impertinent one to boot. The idea of his mentioning our engagement publicly like that!"

"I don't believe he meant to be rude. Elise must have told him."

"I think not."

"Why?"

"I cannot assign a reason for everything, Dorothy."

"Why not Dora! That is your name for me, Edmund."

"One is not obliged always to use the same appellation, child! Of what importance is it whether I call you one, or the other, or neither?"

She looked at him in some surprise, and shrank back into her quiet mood.

"You and Elise will both take cold, that will be the end of this folly. Have you no wrap?"

"It was such a warm day, I did not think I should need one. As to Elise, her dress is very thick. I was surprised to see her put it on. It would have been more suitable for the early autumn."

"It becomes her, and that is what you ladies think most about, I suppose."

"Some do, I dare say."

"Why here is Radcliffe coming alone! What can be the meaning of this?"

He quickly joined them.

"Miss Dunraven," he said, "your sister has sprained her ankle and can't move. We have been waiting, hoping to get her on, but she seems no better. It is awfully unfortunate. I am more than sorry. I thought I had better come and fetch you, as she asked to have Sir Edmund sent to her."

"Oh! poor Elise! Of course we will go to her at once, poor girl! Is she suffering much pain?"

"I am afraid so. That is, when she moves."

A dark cloud settled on the Baronet's face.

"If you had charge of her, Captain Radcliffe, surely you might have taken care of her," he said sternly.

"Indeed it was through no fault of mine. She caught her foot in the root of a tree and fell. No one can regret the fact more than I do."

"I am sure of that; you like Elise, don't you? You and she have been quarrelling and making it up again as long as I can remember."

"That is about it, Miss Dorothy. There is no one more fond of Elise than I am—sincerely fond of her, and I believe she will make a splendid woman in a few years, but you must not let her think herself one yet, or she will be spoiled."

"I believe you are right, but you spoil her more than any one else, I think."

"I'm privileged, you see."

Sir Edmund Drake struck the heel of his boot savagely in the ground, and felt very angry with Dorothy for her familiar chatting with Captain Radcliffe.

When they reached her, Elise Dunraven was leaning against the trunk of a tree, looking rather pale, and the others were gathered sympathetically around her.

"I am sorry you are hurt, darling," said Dorothy, kneeling beside her, and taking her hand.

"I want to get home," said the girl, with a tremble in her lip.

"Of course you do, dear! Someone can lift you up, if we could bring the drag here."

"I can't go in the drag—I hate it," she returned, irritably. "I'll go in the pony cart; it won't shake me half so much."

"It will shake you ten times more, but if you would prefer it, I am sure Edmund will be happy to take charge of you!"

"I should prefer it! One does not want to talk when one is in pain, and you can go on the box seat!"

"Oh, yes, I can do that! Edmund, you can bring the cart round here for Elise, can't you?"

"Are you sure you don't mind, Dora?" he

whispered, falling into the familiar name. "It is kind of you to give Elise your place."

"Yes, I do mind losing your company, dear," she returned, in a low voice; "but I am glad we can help my sister."

He clasped her hand and went to fetch the little pony carriage, and although she was disappointed, she felt very happy at his words of commendation.

"Let them all go," Elise whispered to Sir Edmund, as he attempted to help her to rise.

"Suppose you walk on and start before us; we shall have to come quietly, and Puck will want to run a race with you if you follow us."

The girl gave him a grateful glance, and Dorothy, seeing their wishes, went on with the others in Elise's place, leaving the two alone.

Neither spoke till they were out of sight, then he laid his hand on hers.

"Elise, I am so sorry you are in pain!"

"I don't mind that sort of pain," she answered, with tears upon her long dark lashes.

"What sort do you mind, Elise?"

"The sort you make me suffer," she returned, great drops rolling down her cheeks. "I wish—I wish I were dead!"

"Hush, child! Don't speak like that! Dorothy would never make such a speech!"

"Dorothy!" she said, scornfully. "Dorothy does not know how to enjoy, or how to suffer. She is an iceberg. She cares for nothing. Don't put my feelings beside hers, for Heaven's sake!"

"Do you feel so much, dear girl?"

"Feel!" and she burst into passionate sobbing.

"Don't, Elise, pray, pray don't! I never could stand a woman's tears, as I think I told you before, and if I didn't I meant to!" and he drew her head upon his shoulder, and placed his arm around her waist. "Don't cry, dear girl. Come! tell me, have you had a happy day?"

"Happy! I have been miserable. I shall hate the Burnham Beeches as long as I live!"

"What made you miserable, Elise?"

"You did! You went off with Dorothy, and you wouldn't give me a kind look all day."

"Elise, does Radcliffe care for you?"

"I don't know. I believe he does; but he thinks me too young to love anyone."

"How do you know?"

"He told me so."

"When?"

"To-day."

"Do you love him, Elise?"

"No, I don't think so; but love begets love, you know."

He looked at her. What a beautiful young girl she was, with her rich damask rose hues, and her large speaking eyes!

A great madness took possession of him, and he caught her to his breast.

"Elise, you shall never love him! You have given your love to me, and I claim it! Neither Radcliffe nor any other man shall be anything to you—I swear it!"

"But—Dorothy," and she hung back from him.

Her very lack of reciprocation to his passion at that moment increased it.

"I cannot help Dorothy. My engagement to her is a mistake. If my affection for her were of the right sort I could not feel for you as I do, darling!"

"Are you sure?"

"Certain."

"And you will tell her this?"

"Yes!"

She raised her eyes to his, all aglow with a wild joy. Her face, beautiful as it was before, seemed doubly so as he looked at it.

"Are you now all my own?" she asked.

"I am, and you are mine, Elise!"

Then he held out his arms to her, and, with a glad cry, she sheltered in them.

And the sun sank in the heavens, while the two, forgetful of all but their own passionate happiness, sat there absorbed in their new-found joy.

(To be concluded in our next.)

HER FATHER'S SECRETARY.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Ah, cruel wedding-day! No wonder Gladys wept, as few women weep, as she looked back at it.

They had parted at the door without even a hand-clasp. Rupert had gone on to the library, and she had walked slowly up to her room; and for hours afterward her heart and brain had been in a whirl, as she repeated over and over to herself the sweet words:

"Heaven is kind, for my one prayer has been granted. I am now Rupert's wife—his wife! I shall go through life by his side, his companion by night and by day;" and a flood of happy tears filled her blue eyes as she gave herself up to the bewildering day-dreams of the golden future.

She remembered how her heart had throbbed when she met him at luncheon.

She had felt like going up to him, and, kneeling before him, whisper:

"Why need we keep our marriage a secret? We ought to tell your mother and Gwen to-day—now!"

Then had come that evening in the drawing-room when he had been so attentive to Gwen, as they tried new songs together, and seemed to have almost forgotten her presence. How little she had dreamed as she rose and hurriedly quitted the room, that she was destined never to look upon his face in this life again, for on that night she had met with the tragic occurrence at the Black Pool.

Had he indeed married her in a moment of thoughtlessness—regretting it as soon as the ceremony had been performed, and eagerly seizing the first opportunity to annul that bondage and free himself?

"If his life will be the happier for it, I must bear my lot without complaining," moaned Gladys.

Would to Heaven she could have looked upon his face just one little moment, and then have gone quietly away, was the despairing cry of her heart. But to die like this, and she so young and life so sweet to her! Ah, pitying Heaven! did ever a young girl meet a more pitiful fate!

For long hours Gladys searched vainly for some means of making her escape, but it was useless; there was no way of exit from the tower save by the oaken door. Her wild cries had proved futile, and her desperate efforts to attract the attention of the servants by the noise of pushing the heavy articles of furniture over the wooden floor proved useless.

How was she able to know that the sound was completely drowned by the hammers of carpenters repairing the stairway of the western wing?

Could no one hear her cries? Was it destined that she should die there, in all her youth and strength!

A great faintness seized her as time wore on; her mouth was parched; she would have given worlds for one drop of cooling water, and she was weak, too, from want of food.

She had often read with pity of the horrible torture of starvation. Was she beginning to experience it? she wondered vaguely, lifting her heavy, tear-dimmed eyes to the small bit of window-pane near the ceiling, through which the waning light drifted in.

Long hours came and went, and Gladys's sufferings grew so intense at length, as the hours lengthened into the third day, that she prayed Heaven to send relief or death to her.

Suddenly a strange thought came to her. She remembered that in the pocket of her dress was a small vial containing a darkish liquid, which the doctor who had so lately attended her during her recent illness had left with her at parting.

"In your hands I think it will be safe," he had said, kindly, "though it is a dangerous drug. If taken in any quantity; three drops will revive you, while a dozen would produce death."

"It is fate that I have it with me," thought Gladys, feeling her cold, trembling hand in the pocket of her dress.

"A dozen drops would produce death!" she

repeated. "Ay, one draught of it will put me out of my misery. Why should I suffer when I have relief from all ills in my very grasp? Good-bye, Rupert, my first and only love," she sobbed, raising the fatal vial. "You will never know that I died with your name on my lips—you will never know, when you think of poor Gladys, how well she loved you—that you were the only gleam of brightness that lighted a desolate life. Another will claim you here, Rupert, my love, but I will be waiting for you up there. Heaven will not be heaven to me—without you!"

With a little piteous "Heaven forgive me!" Gladys raised the vial to her lips.

One instant more, and a life which was at stake would have been sacrificed. But it was not to be, for in that instant there was heard a sudden booming sound, followed by a severe shock that shook the house to its very foundation, and a deafening sound of falling rocks and timber, and the western wall of the tower fell outward with a loud crash.

The shock had hurled Gladys to the floor, and the vial she held in her hand was dashed into a thousand fragments.

There was a sudden glare of light in the darkened room—blood-red, mixed with the feeble light of a dying day, and the next instant a great volume of thick, black smoke shut even that from her view.

Gladys uttered no cry, no moan; she was too weak, too dazed for that, though she realised at once that the western wall of the tower had fallen, and that the whole structure was on fire.

She could hear the hoarse screams of people as she crept toward the jagged opening, the ringing of fire-bells, and the wild tramping of hurried feet.

For an instant the thick volume of smoke cleared, and looking down through the intense white heat, Gladys saw a great sea of upturned faces.

"Help! help!" she cried, stretching out her white arms to the crowd below. "Save me!"

Then a great puff of blinding smoke hid her from their view.

But they had seen her, and a wild cry of horror broke from every lip, and cries of, "My God! there is a woman in the tower!"

"Save me!" cried the faint voices again.

They all heard, and strong men turned pale, and women fainted.

The crowd below seemed paralysed.

What man among them dared risk his life in that burning fire trap? Even the ladder which had been placed at one of the upper windows had already become sport for the flames.

Two brave men had made the daring attempt of mounting the ladder as far as the second story, but the intense heat drove them back.

"It is useless!" they cried, dropping back in despair. "The girl is beyond mortal aid; her doom is sealed!"

"Stand back!" cried a clarion voice. "I will make the attempt!"

And ere they could prevent him, Rupert Dane, who had forced his way through the crowd, leaped upon the burning ladder.

There was a hushed cry as he disappeared through one of the arched windows, and above it they heard the piercing scream of a woman hedged in by the dense throng, and they recognized her at once as Rupert's mother.

"Why did not some one hold him back!" she cried, frantically. "He has gone to his death! and he was my only son!"

A hoarse shout drowned her voice.

"See! he has reached the tower!" came from a dozen throats.

Every face was upturned.

For one brief instant the smoke had cleared away, and they saw him dash past the opening.

In that one instantaneous glance they saw that his face was pale as death, but resolute and brave; then a great cloud of smoke hid him from their view again.

A moment of dreadful suspense dragged itself by.

Oh! how his mother fell on her knees holding out her hands to Heaven to save her boy, her only son.

Another moment passed, and it seemed the length of eternity to those who watched with white upturned faces and strained eyes, but he did not reappear.

Some interior portion of the house fell in with a dull thud, and a hushed cry rose from every throat. Had it carried with it the noble hero who had risked his life to save the young girl in the tower?

The people looked at one another with pallid faces and moist eyes; then looked in pity at the frantic mother, who was still petitioning the angels to return her darling, her only son, to her.

Suddenly a great cry broke from every lip. They beheld Rupert at the window, with the slender form of the girl in his arms.

A dozen strong men sprang forward to steady the swaying ladder down which he had commenced clambering.

They all noticed how he swayed and reeled with every step, and a new horror filled every breast. He must be badly injured. They could see that he made the descent with much difficulty, and they were not surprised when within six feet or so from the ground, he suddenly reeled and fell backward with his heavy burden clutched closely in his arms.

A dozen pairs of hands were instantly stretched out to save him, and when they laid him down tenderly on the grass by his mother's side, cheer after cheer rent the air.

The next instant the four walls of the house fell in with a deafening crash.

One glance at the girl her son had saved, and Mrs. Dane fell back with a hysterical cry.

"Do I dream, or do my eyes deceive me!" she whispered in an awe-struck voice. "It is—Gladys! But no; it cannot be, for Gladys sleeps in her far-off grave. It is some fatal resemblance."

But even as she muttered the words, the crowd pressing round the girl cried,—

"It is Gladys Barton, the miller's niece, who disappeared from the village months ago!"

No one in her old home, save Mr. Melville and his wife, knew that Gladys had accompanied the Danes to their new home, and of the subsequent events that had transpired, therefore none had heard the story of her supposed death.

Kind hands quickly removed Rupert and Gladys to a neighbouring house, where the inmates of The Mount had found shelter, Mrs. Dane following like one in a dream.

Who was this creature who had been saved from the tower, who bore so striking a resemblance to poor dead Gladys?

What would Mr. Melville and his wife say when they looked upon her face! And Gwen, who two days before had become Rupert's wife—why, the terrible resemblance might kill her!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

No one knew how the fire at The Mount originated, and the valiant rescue of Gladys was the principal theme of conversation for the next ten days.

The simple village folk would have had much more to arouse their interest had they but known of the thrilling episodes that were taking place in the temporary home in which the Melvilles, with Rupert and his mother, had taken up their abode.

The utter consternation of the lawyer and his wife, upon beholding Gladys and learning that she had been rescued from the tower of The Mount, can be better imagined than described.

Yes, this was certainly Gladys in the flesh, and the girl who had died in the railway accident, and been buried in her name, had led them into a terrible mistake. But there was one thing that both the lawyer and his wife were thankful for, and that was that Rupert, who had so recently wed their darling Gwen, had been legally separated from Gladys.

"But what was she doing in the tower of The Mount!" they asked each other, in amazement, as they bent over her unconscious form.

"There is but one theory practicable," re-

turned Mr. Melville, "we know she was not a guest, and it is my opinion that, knowing the ways of the place, the girl succeeded in gaining an entrance to the house to witness the marriage of Gwen and Rupert, which she must have done, and the diabolical scheme entered her head to fire the place that they might thus perish. She found no opportunity to put her scheme into practice until to-night, and I also quite believe that the flames spread so rapidly retreat from below was literally cut off, and she was obliged to take refuge in the tower, where her awful crime came near receding on her own head."

"It was a strange irony of fate," he added, in a husky voice, "that Rupert should have saved our Gwen, his bride, and then go back and rescue this girl at the risk of his own life. She had planned to take all our lives in a most dastardly fashion. We were saved by almost a miracle. That is a bad cut on Rupert's head. I doubt if he will be about for many a day. A piece of burning timber must have struck him."

"I can think of nothing save what Gwen will say when she hears all, as she must, sooner or later. With her usual goodness of heart she will attempt to shield the girl from punishment for her terrible crime," returned Mrs. Melville.

"I cannot believe that Gladys ever set fire to The Mount," said Mrs. Dane, slowly. "I would as soon believe an angel from Heaven guilty of it."

Both Mr. Melville and his wife were surprised to hear Rupert's mother defend her.

"You might be the last one expected to make a remark of that kind," returned the lawyer, slowly.

"Why?" exclaimed Mrs. Dane, anxiously. "Because of her faithlessness to Rupert," he returned.

He saw her eyes fill, and she turned quickly away to hide her emotion.

"She left your son for another," he went on, sternly, "therefore, why should you have faith in the girl and expect anything but dishonour from her?"

"I have always believed there is something yet to be explained about that affair," replied Mrs. Dane, in a tremulous voice. "She loved Rupert so well. Ah! she idolized him. I am sure of that."

"The letter you found in her room does not look as though she cared for him," cut in Mrs. Melville, adding: "Therefore I say your pity is wasted upon her."

"But what disposition shall we make of the girl?" she asked, turning to her husband—"send her to the hospital!"

It was Mrs. Dane who answered.

"She must remain here," she said, decisively, "where I can watch over and nurse and care for her. She once saved my son's life—the memory of that sweeps all else from my mind when I see her lying there ill and helpless."

Mr. Melville and his wife faced her simultaneously.

"Here! under this roof—with Rupert!" they both echoed in a breath.

"I will not permit it!" cried Mrs. Melville, indignantly. "Nothing of the kind shall be done; it would be the grossest of insults to our Gwen."

"I shall nurse Gladys until she is out of danger," replied Mrs. Dane, gently, but firmly. "If you desire to turn her from your door, weak and ill as you see she is, I simply say it is my place to follow her."

"I see we shall have to compromise the matter," said Mr. Melville. "Let the girl remain here until she is able to depart, if you will, but we shall take your son's bride—our Gwen—away. Of course you will not object to Rupert's being taken where his wife is. That will be practically abandoning the place to the young woman who has attempted to murder us all in our beds."

"I cannot be parted from my son," said Mrs. Dane, distressfully.

They settled the matter reluctantly at length, that Gladys might be permitted to remain beneath that roof for the present at least, but that all knowledge of this great indignity, as they phrased it, be kept from Gwen, and in no

enviable frame of mind Mr. Melville and his wife quitted the room, leaving Mrs. Dane alone with Gladys, who was still unconscious.

It was not until they reached their own apartment that husband and wife gave vent to their anger in having Gladys beneath that roof.

"I see how it will end!" cried Mrs. Melville, confronting her husband with white face and gleaming eyes. "If Gladys remains here under the same roof with Rupert's Dane, he will desert our Gwen and go back to that girl. That is the point his mother is working for. I can see it ahead. And—and—oh, husband, it would kill our Gwen, she loves him so!"

"That which you predict will never come to pass," returned Mr. Melville, hoarsely. "No man shall ever forsake my daughter and find happiness with another woman while I live. I would shoot Dane first!"

But the thought of handsome Rupert lying wounded, shot down by her husband's hand, brought no comfort to Mrs. Melville's agitated mind, and she said so.

"Something must be done to prevent such a catastrophe," she repeated, vehemently.

For a moment Mr. Melville paced impatiently up and down, without replying.

His face was set in a deep frown, a habit he had when thinking intently.

"There is but one effectual way of removing this girl from Gwen's path," he said, harshly.

"And that way!" asked his wife in a low, breathless voice.

"Is to have her convicted of arson, and sent to prison."

Mrs. Melville drew her breath with a gasp of dismay.

"Is she not guilty?" he asked, harshly.

"She would have burned us all in our beds, had not Gwen fortunately discovered the smoke ere the whole house was enveloped in flames. What mercy should be shown the perpetrator of so dastardly an act, when so many human lives were at stake!"

"None," replied Mrs. Melville, decidedly. "The crime does indeed deserve severe punishment, but one has to steel one's heart considerably to contemplate the end. I will go and see how Gwen is. The shock has almost killed her, I am afraid," said Mrs. Melville, preferring to quit the room rather than discuss the unpleasant subject further.

She found Gwen kneeling beside the couch on which they had placed Rupert.

She looked up as her mother entered, but did not change her position, save to tighten her arms more closely about her young husband's neck.

"How did it happen, mother?" she whispered, indicating the great red, irregular scar upon his white forehead. "The men who brought him here could not, or would not, tell me."

"A burning beam fell upon him," replied Mrs. Melville, crossing the room to where Gwen knelt, and fondly kissing the lovely, tearful, upturned face. "He is not seriously hurt, my darling," she added, with a show of cheerfulness she was very far from feeling. "Do not alarm yourself unnecessarily about him."

"How can I help but feel the keenest alarm when I love him so?" murmured Gwen, laying her soft, warm cheek against Rupert's colourless, cold one. "I love him better than life itself, mamma!"

"Oh, my dear," cried Mrs. Melville, in alarm, "such idolatry is very wrong! You must not give yourself up so completely to love for Rupert. I—I—fumble to see and hear you! Think what would become of you if—if anything should ever happen to—to take him from you!"

"Let me tell you what would happen, mamma," she whispered in a low, intense voice: "I should either drop dead when the news first reached me, or I should go mad!"

"I hope you will never lose him until you are both old, and have walked down the hill of life together," her mother answered, solemnly. "I wish you had not made that remark, though,

about dying or going mad; it will always trouble me when I think of it."

"Then do not think of it, mamma," she returned, promptly; "or forget what I said."

"If I only could," sobbed her mother, fervently.

"But you have not told me what caused the scar on his forehead," she persisted. "Tell me about it quickly, before the doctor comes. I think you said something about a burning beam falling upon him; but you must be mistaken. I do not remember any such occurrence."

"It was after he brought you out that it happened," replied Mrs. Melville. "He went back into the burning building—to rescue a woman, and bringing her out nearly cost him his life. Had the beam struck him fairly on the head it would have killed him."

"He went back to save—a woman!" repeated Gwen, in wonder. "I thought the servants were all out! I saw them—every one."

"There was a woman in the tower. He saved her," responded Mrs. Melville.

She never forgot to her dying day the wild cry that broke from Gwen's bloodless lips, and the next instant she had fallen to the floor a senseless heap at her feet.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. MELVILLE did not summon one of the servants when Gwen swooned, but did her best to revive her daughter herself.

"My poor darling!" she sobbed, kissing the lovely marble-white face and dark curling hair. "I wonder the blow did not kill her!"

At last, when all her efforts seemed futile, Mrs. Melville, in alarm, summoned her husband.

The lawyer's brow darkened as he entered and discovered the condition of affairs as rapidly related by his wife.

"Does she know that Gladys is being cared for beneath this roof?" he said, brusquely, turning to his wife.

He did not know that the dark eyes had slowly opened while he asked the question, and that Gwen realised its import at once, and listened for the answer with breathless intensity.

Mrs. Melville pointed to Gwen, her face whitening.

"You should have waited until we were alone before you asked that question," she said; "she has heard it."

"I might as well know all, mamma," Gwen sobbed. "Did Rupert recognise Gladys before he—he went to her rescue?"

Neither her father nor mother could answer this, but both were forced to admit that they thought it quite likely.

At that moment a messenger appeared at the door to say that Mr. Dane was calling for Gwen.

"I will go to him alone," she said, rising hastily from her couch. "If we should want either or both of you, I will call you."

With that Gwen glided from the room.

Rupert was seated in a reclining-chair by the window when she entered his apartment. She was startled at the expression on his face as she came up to him; she had never seen that look on it before, and the grave expression of it filled her soul with the keenest alarm.

"Sit down, Gwen," he said, in a hoarse, constrained voice, "while I tell you that which will startle you greatly."

She obeyed mutely.

"I have no doubt that they have told you how I went back to The Mount after I had carried you out and to safety to save a young girl from being burned to death in the tower."

"Yes," said Gwen.

It almost seemed to her that she could not have uttered another word if her life had depended upon it.

"That young girl was—Ah, how shall I tell you the astonishing discovery I made? She was Gladys, my—"

He stopped short, looking confused and distressed.

He saw Gwen's face grow alarmingly pale, and he went on, huskily,—

"The girl in the railway accident whom we all thought was Gladys, and whom we buried in the family vault, was not she. How she came to be in that tower is a mystery to me. I did not know who was there when I resolved upon the perilous undertaking. I only knew that a woman was in danger, and not one would peril his life to save her.

"When I reached the tower I found the door locked, and hearing moans from within, I burst it open; and—ah, Gwen, I shall never forget while life lasts the sight that met my view! In the middle of the floor knelt a figure, clearly outlined against the crimson glare in the background, the white face and white arms were lifted heavenward—I knew she was praying.

"She heard my quick step, and turned her face towards me, crying out: 'Help! Save me! Oh, save me!'

"The voice fairly paralyzed me—held me spell-bound for an instant, and when I saw her face I almost felt my heart break with horror, it seemed to me so like Gladys.

"Then she turned and saw me, and we looked into each other's face by the bright-red glare of light.

"'Rupert!'" she cried in a voice that sounded like a voice from the tomb—"It is I—Gladys! You did not know that, or you would not have come to save me. Save your life—never mind me. Let me die!"

"And, with those words, she sank senseless at my feet.

"I grasped her in my arms, and hurried down the winding stair. Then commenced my fight for life—ay! two lives.

"The heat suffocated me, the flames drove me back at every step, and the great volumes of black smoke blinded me; but with energy born of despair, I pushed on; but just as I reached the window a burning beam struck me.

"How I reached the window and clambered down the ladder with my heavy burden I have but a faint recollection; but this much I do remember: within a few feet of the ground my overstrained nerves gave way completely, and I knew no more.

"The doctor who attended me says they caught me as I fell, and took her unharmed from my arms, and that she is being cared for beneath this roof. I—I thought it best that you should hear the story from my lips."

He was startled at the expression on Gwen's death-white face. She completely lost control of herself.

"When you found out who it was, why didn't you leave her there to die?" she cried, excitedly.

He recoiled from her as though she had dealt him a sudden blow.

"Gwen," he said, sternly, "you do not mean that horrible remark—you could not!"

"I do mean it!" she reiterated, wildly and vehemently, adding, "If you had proper spirit, after the way she served you, you would have left her to her fate."

"Heaven forbid!" answered Rupert, sternly. "May Heaven find pardon for you for those unfeeling, unwomanly words. I could not have believed such words had fallen from your lips had I not heard them. I would risk my life to save even an avowed enemy if I saw him in such peril, and I had even the remotest hope of saving him. And—when I saw that it was Gladys, I—I would have risked a dozen lives, had I possessed them, to rescue her."

"It is because you love her still!" cried Gwen shrilly. "You need not deny it. Is it not so?"

"It is too late to talk on that subject now," he retorted, coldly. "I decline to discuss it."

A bitter, sneering laugh fell from Gwen's lips. "No doubt you are delighted to have her under the same roof, that you may pose as a noble hero and receive her gratitude. Now hear me: the same house is not big enough for us both; either she or I must leave it."

"Gwen," he cried, huskily, "I entreat you to say no more at such a time. Gladys is not able to be removed. I will take you away if you really desire it as soon as I am able to go. More I cannot promise."

"You must promise me one thing," cried Gwen, eagerly. "Say you will do as I wish."

"How can I say yes without knowing what it is that you wish me to do?" he said, gravely, adding, "This much I will say: if it is in reason and will not impair my honour as a gentleman, I would have no choice but to comply."

"Then you will not give me your promise beforehand?"

"No," he replied, decisively.

There was deep, constrained silence between them for a moment.

Gwen crept up close to him, laying her burning hands on his.

"Promise me that you will never look upon Gladys's face again," she cried, hoarsely, "that you will not go to her, not even if she sends for you."

He started back and looked at her sorrowfully.

"You ask this in the heat of passion and on the spur of the moment," he said, gently.

"Think this matter over calmly, and you will see how embarrassing it would be for me where she sends for me and I refused to go to her. How could I refuse? For what reason? You must see for yourself upon reflection what a dastardly action it would be to refuse. But let me add this—in such a case I should earnestly request you to accompany me, Gwen, for the reason that you appear unable to trust your husband."

"You loved her once—you love her still," cried Gwen, stormily, "and I repeat you must not go to her even if she were to send for you. It would be an insult to me if you did."

Rupert leaned back in his chair, burying his fair, handsome head in his hands, with a deep groan.

"You do not deny it, for you know you cannot," cried Gwen, excitedly. "You love her still, I say."

"Hush!" he muttered, hoarsely, "I cannot bear it. You will drive me mad!"

"Why do you not add that you abhor a jealous woman?" she went on, shrilly, "for I am that and more; but I have just cause for jealousy if ever a woman had."

"Under every and any circumstance you should have full faith and trust in the man you have married," he said slowly, "otherwise you wrong him immeasurably."

"You cannot get out of the matter by argument or by showing it up in a false light. You are longing to see her, and you know it!" stormed Gwen.

At that moment there was a hurried tap at the door, and in answer to Rupert's "Come in" a servant appeared on the threshold.

"I bring a message from the young girl whom you rescued, sir," he said. "She requests to see you if you are able to come to her. What answer am I to take back to her, sir?"

Gwen rose slowly from her kneeling posture and looked Rupert full in the face.

How blind he was that he did not read the danger signals in her dark, flashing eyes.

"What do you propose to do?" she asked in a low, tense voice.

He looked greatly disturbed.

The message had come to him so suddenly that he was taken by surprise, and was at a disadvantage.

"What do you propose to do? I repeat," said Gwen, in a steady voice.

"I have no choice but to comply with the request, Gwen," he said, firmly; adding, "I entreat that you do not make a scene. Come with me, Gwen," he urged—"do come with me. It would be no more than right on your part, under the circumstances."

"You shall not go!" cried Gwen. "A wife has the right to dictate where her husband may go and where he may not go, especially if there is another woman in the background."

"Heaven forbid!" replied Rupert indignantly. "A woman who is afraid to trust her husband out of her sight, lest he make love to another woman, degrades the man by letting him see she has no faith in his honour. Your course has decided my action. I will be gentleman enough to go to Gladys."

(To be continued.)

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The eagle either builds its nest upon the top of a mighty tree growing far up on the mountain, among myriads of twisting vines, and the thickest and most inaccessible bushes or shrubs, or on the summit of a high rock. It is always a large one, strongly and comfortably built, large sticks and branches being laid together, neatly flat, and bound with twining vines. The spacious inside is covered with hair and mosses, so minutely woven together that no wind can penetrate. In this abode the mother bird lays two eggs, which are great curiosities. The long end of the egg tapers down to a point, while its colour is a dirt or brownish red, with many dots and spots upon it. The young birds are driven forth from the nest by their savage parents to scratch for themselves as soon as they are able to fly, and no training whatever is given them by the old bird. That is left to their instinct, which hunger and necessity develop. There is no going back to the old home for the young eagle, for the mother bird at once tears up every vestige of the nest, where they have thriven since birth, and while they emit plaintive shrieks, darts at them and pushes them off the crags or rocks, and as they must take to their wings or fall, this is how they learn to fly at once. It takes three years for a young eagle to gain its full and complete plumage.

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FACETIE.

If there is such a thing as a spoiled child, it always belongs to a neighbour.

"Do you understand women?" "Yes. I understand them well enough to know that I can't understand them at all."

SHE: "John, I am sure there's a burglar down stairs." He: "Well, we can tell by examining the silverware in the morning."

YOUNG SAFETY: "Do you think Miss Amy will come down soon?" Effie: "I am sure I hope so; for, really, I find you a very hard man to entertain."

MR. SEALOVE (at his sea-shore cottage): "My dear, please tell our daughter to sing something less doleful!" Mrs. Sealove: "That is not our daughter, my love. That is the foghorn."

"Is Miss Stratilace circumspect?" asked Miss Pert. "Circumspect!" cried Miss Caustic. "Why, she won't accompany a young man on the piano without a chaperon."

WATTS: "Why do you make such a row about that umbrella you lost? Haven't you ever lost an umbrella before?" Smith: "Yes; but this one was my very own, don't you see?"

NELL: "I thought you said May's fiancé was a white-haired octogenarian! His hair is jet black." Belle: "Ah, that's what he meant, then, when he said he would dye for her."

JACK: "True friendship is so uninteresting." Tom: "What do you mean?" Jack: "Madge is so fond of me that she never tells me the hateful things other girls say about me."

MR. STAYLATE: "I hear your mother's step on the stairs, and I shall be able to bid her good night." Sleepy Beauty (wearily): "It can't be mother. She's a late sleeper. Probably it is the girl coming down to lay the fire."

"So you've lost your new servant already?" remarked a lady sympathetically to a neighbour. "Yes." "What time did she go?" "I really can't tell," was the reply; "she took my watch with her."

PEASANT: "Forty shillings fine for trespassing on this estate." Tourist: "But why is no warning sign put up, then?" Peasant: "We had one, but took it down again, for while it was up no one came in."

"DEAR ME, that was terrible! Man fell overboard in mid-ocean the other day, and was never seen again!" said Hicks. "Drowned!" asked Mrs. Hicks. "Oh, no! of course not. Sprained his ankle, probably!" said Hicks.

SHE: "Why did you start so?" He: "Did I understand you to say that your father is falling?" She: "Physically, I mean." He (settling back): "Oh, all right! I was afraid it was something serious."

"Is your partner a man of good judgment?" asked an old friend who is in the city on a visit. "There," was the unctuous answer, "is a man of infallible judgment. He never makes a move without taking my advice."

TEACHER: "Well, little boy, what's your name?" Little Boy: "Shadrach Nebuchadnezzar Zoots." "Who gave you that name?" "I don't know; but if I find out when I gets older, they'll be sorry for it."

THE doctor was very ill. "Shall I send for a physician," asked his wife, "or can you prescribe some of your own medicine?" "No, no; send for the doctor!" cried the patient. "If I must die, do not let it be by my own hand."

FATHER: "My dear, wasn't that young Mr. Haglitt who just went out?" Daughter: "Yes, papa." Father: "Did I not issue an injunction against his coming here?" Daughter: "Yes; but he appealed to a higher court, and mamma reversed your decision."

MISTRESS: "What is the trouble, Maggie?" You look worried." Maggie: "Sure, and the trouble is with the twins, mum. One of them is cryin' because he swallowed his rattle and the other is howlin' out of sympathy, and betwixt the two of them bawlin' I can't tell which swallowed the rattle."

"I SUPPOSE that there are many problems which Polar explorers seek to solve," said the unscientific man. "Yes," replied the intrepid traveller, "a great many." "What is the most important one?" "Getting back."

"MAMMA," said Master Harry, "how fat Amelia has grown." "Yes," replied his mamma; "but don't say 'fat,' dear; say 'stout.'" At the dinner-table, on the following day, Harry was asked if he would take any fat. "No, thank you," said Harry, "I'll take some stout."

NERVOUS PASSENGER: "Captain, what would be the result if the steamer should strike an iceberg while we are plunging through this fog?" Captain of Steamship: "The iceberg would move right along, madam, just as if nothing had happened."

PARENT: "Who is the laziest boy in your class, Johnny?" Johnny: "I don't know." "Then you ought to know. When all the others are industriously writing or studying their lessons, who is he that sits idly in his seat and watches the rest, instead of working himself?" "The teacher."

A WELL-KNOWN Dundee angler, who had been fishing the whole day and got nothing but nibbles, was accosted by one of the keepers, who said: "Are you aware this water is private, and that you are not allowed to take fish from it?" "Heavens, man," replied the angler, "I'm not takin' your fish—I'm feedin' them!"

"Oh," she cried, "If I could only see myself as others see me!" "It wouldn't do," said he. "It would make you too conceited." And then, she smiled upon him all the rest of the evening.

FRIEND (over the wine after dinner): "Your wife is certainly a brilliantly handsome woman. I should think you would be jealous of her." Host (confidentially): "To tell you the truth, Robbins, I am. I never invite anybody here that a sane woman could possibly take the least fancy to."

OFFICER (to new servant): "Murphy, I have left my mess boots out this morning. I want them soled." Private Murphy: "Very good, sir." Officer (later in the day): "Did you take those boots, Murphy?" Private Murphy (feeling in his pocket and putting on the table eightpence): "Yes, sir; and that's all I could get for them. The corporal who bought them said he would have given 2s. had it been pay-day." Collapse of officer.

A LATE and most lovable Edinburgh D.D. was in his study one evening when his wife rather excitedly called him by name from the foot of the stairs. He put his head quietly over the banister and inquired what was wrong. His wife called out: "There's a man in the kitchen! There's a man in the kitchen!" The divine answered calmly,—"Well! well! Marg'ret, you won't let the girls out: what can you expect?" and silently returned to his sermon.

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SOCIETY.

PRINCE MAX OF SAXONY, who was working last year as a mission priest in Whitechapel, has taken up his residence at Wurzberg with a view to obtaining the degree of Doctor of Theology from the University.

THE Queen will reside at Balmoral until the middle of November, and her Majesty is due to return to Windsor on Saturday the 13th for a stay at the Castle of between four and five weeks before going to Osborne for Christmas.

THE Empress Frederick, after spending at least a week at Buckingham Palace, will go on to Scotland, remaining there with the Queen until the third week in November, when the Court will come south to Windsor. It is expected that when the Queen goes to Osborne for Christmas, the Empress will go to Sandringham and spend a week or two with the Prince and Princess of Wales.

THE Emperor of Austria, it may not be generally known, is also "King of Jerusalem," a title which the German Kaiser is anxious to gain for himself, and his Imperial Majesty is always addressed as his "Apostolic" Majesty, and the late Empress bore the title of "Protectress of the Eastern Cross," as our Queen claims the title of "Defender of the Faith." The late Empress had also an Order which she valued very greatly, namely, the Bavarian Order of Theresa, given for art and science, and she was besides a dame of the noble order of St. John of Malta, originally established by the Crusaders.

THE Empress Eugénie has finally given up her original intention of passing the coming winter in Egypt. The widow of Napoleon III. is now rapidly approaching her seventy-third year, and suffers much from rheumatism and physical weakness. The fatigue of travelling tells upon her more and more, and as years go on she feels the emotions aroused by revisiting old scenes too poignant. Unfortunately, yachting, which, in most respects, is the form of travelling which does her the most good, has lately been condemned by her medical advisers as being bad for her rheumatic condition.

THE immense fortune of the late Empress of Austria was absolutely at her own disposal, and it is understood that she has left it among her daughters, the Emperor having a life interest both in the various estates in Lower Austria and Hungary and in the bulk of the investments. There are numerous legacies to members of the personal household of the Empress and to her servants. The jewels are valued at ten millions of marks, and these were the private property of the Empress, quite apart from the Imperial jewels, which are heirlooms. The great wealth of the Empress Elizabeth was due to the vast rise in the value of property all round Vienna. Forty years ago a considerable surplus from her Majesty's income was regularly invested every few months in land, which was bought at the agricultural value, and now all this land is covered with houses and buildings, and has been resold at a fabulous profit.

THE late Empress of Austria possessed the most magnificent collection of gems of any Royal personage in Europe; for besides her private gems given her by her devoted husband, she had the most perfect and complete set of "black" pearls in existence. These her Majesty had not worn for twenty years; but they may be seen at the Treasury Chamber in Vienna on obtaining a permit through Sir Horace Rumbold. The only corresponding collection of pearls in the world is the "Cumberland" collection of "rose" pearls worn by the Queen at her coronation, which has since gone back to the Cumberland family, and are now worn by Princess Frederica of Hanover, wife of Baron von Pawel Rammigen. The State pearls of Austria can only be worn by an Empress, and they are said to be valued at half a million sterling. The biggest "black" pearl is two inches long and half an inch across.

STATISTICS.

THE average life of women who work for a living is thirty-six years.

IN ten years the descendants of two rabbits will number 70,000,000.

THERE are said to be 230 glaciers in the Alps over five miles in length.

THE sea-coast line of the globe is computed to be about 186,000 miles.

NEARLY one-fifth of the students at Swiss universities are women.

IN England there are eighty-four male to sixteen female offenders; in Scotland the proportion is sixty-seven to thirty-three.

GEMS.

LOVE is like a convex mirror—it broadens what we see in it.

A NOBLE heart, like the sun, showeth its greatest countenance in its lowest estate.

MAN is like a plant, which requires a favourable soil for the full expansion of its natural or innate powers.

OF all virtues, magnanimity is the rarest; there are a hundred persons of merits for one who willingly acknowledges it in another.

MANHOOD begins when we have in any way made truce with necessity; but begins joyfully and hopefully only when we have reconciled ourselves to necessity.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SPICE LOAF CAKE.—Two eggs, one and one-half cups milk, one tablespoonful butter, three cups flour, one teaspoonful of baking powder to each cup of flour, two teaspoonfuls of cinnamon two teaspoonfuls of allspice, a little salt.

SQUASH BISCUITS.—Boil one large cupful of squash and mash fine; add one cup of bread sponge, half a cup of butter, half a cup of sugar. Mix thoroughly with the hands and add enough flour to make a soft dough. Cut in biscuits, and let rise about an hour. Bake in steady oven and eat warm.

PRUNE WHIP.—Twenty prunes; boil until tender, remove pits and chop very fine. Add half-cup of powdered sugar, whites of four eggs beaten to a stiff froth, half a cup more sugar; stir in the prunes, whip all lightly together; put in a large dish, bake in a moderate oven half an hour, serve with whipped cream.

CHOCOLATE JELLY.—Two cakes of chocolate grated into a scant quart of sweet milk; set on fire to boil. When chocolate is dissolved, add sugar and vanilla to taste and one box gelatine that has been dissolved in a little water; boil together for three minutes, strain, pour in mould and set on ice to harden.

SHERRY BOUILLON.—Four pounds of juicy beef, one knuckle of veal, two small turnips, two carrots, one soup bunch, one small red pepper, two small white onions, salt, six quarts of water. Boil six hours and strain through a sieve. Let it stand over night. Skim off the grease, put into a kettle to heat and add sherry to taste.

RUSSIAN SALAD.—Cold boiled or roast beef, well done. Chop to size of a pea, five or six slices of bacon fried crisp, two small bunches of lettuce and one bunch of celery. Cut all up fine; add a half a can of French peas, a little vinegar, salt and pepper to taste and a cupful of mayonnaise dressing and mix. Spread on platter; add a thin layer of salad dressing over the top; garnish edge with watercress and pickles, chopped fine, and serve.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Japanese are, as a race, so small that it is necessary to build specially low bicycles for them.

WASHING is done in Japan by getting into a boat and letting the garments to be washed drag after the boat by a long string.

AN authority on microscopy states that the hair of a woman can be distinguished by its construction from that of a man when examined through the microscope.

THE Victoria Lily of Galana has a circular leaf from 6ft. to 12ft. in diameter. It is turned up at the edge like a tray, and can support, according to its size, from 100lb. to 360lb.

THE Spanish Escorial is built in the shape of a gridiron, 640ft. by 580ft. There are three large churches in the enclosure, one containing the tombs of most of the Spanish kings and queens.

AUSTRALIAN savages eat the green ants raw. They stamp upon an ant-hill until the ants run up their legs, when they scrape them off as fast as they come up and transfer them to their mouths.

ORNITHOLOGISTS tell us that, when feeding, the stride of the ostrich is from 20 inches to 22 inches; when walking, but not feeding, 26 inches; and when terrified, 11½ to 14 feet, or at the rate of about 25 miles an hour.

A PECULIAR law, in regard to life-insurance, prevails in Germany. If a man whose life is insured loses both hands, he can at once claim the full amount of insurance, on the ground that he has been deprived of the means of support.

WEDDING presents originated in a feudal tribute from the vassals to their lord. When feudalism ceased, the presents became voluntary. In the days of Queen Elizabeth, a pair of knives or scissors were a common gift, and symbolised the cutting of unfaithful love.

THE rhinoceros-beetle has a tenacious and as powerful a grasp as the most ferocious bulldog. Its head may be two-thirds torn from its body, and it will not loosen its hold. It has real horns, and not mandibles, like many of its family.

EDUKWEISS is to be protected by law in the Austrian Alps. The Emperor has signed laws passed by the Diets of Styria and Carinthia forbidding the removal of the plant with its roots, the sale of it to tourists, and exportation in large quantities.

A SCIENTIST has discovered that electrical currents in the form of waves rapidly succeeding one another can produce insensibility to pain and cold in the flesh, acting as an anaesthetic like ether. When the currents were applied to the finger and thumb by wires, the finger could be pricked with a pin without pain.

EGYPT has a reputation for miracles, but the miracle of the desert railways is perhaps the most extraordinary of all. For in the twenty years since Ismail began his costly line much that is well-nigh incredible has been performed on the northern end of that Cairo to Cape Town line, which is becoming more and more a practical factor in the future of Africa. The news is hardly old of the opening of the Bulawayo Station when it is announced that tickets will soon be issued to Athabasca, and in no long period for Khartoum itself. The railroad is constantly vanishing into sandy space at the rate of over a mile a day far toward the south. What this has involved it is difficult to realise. For two hundred miles at a time the pioneer trains had to be sent to the front in a waterless waste, carrying ten thousand gallons in the engine tank and more in the reservoirs, and all this on a line where every inch tells. At last those in charge found wells of water in that thirsty land, and greater speed and safety became possible. The engineering difficulties surmounted remain an unintelligible achievement; but the strategic importance of the line and its service to civilization at large are things as obvious as they are invaluable.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S. L.—The next leap-year is 1904.

IGNORANT.—MSS. means manuscripts.

EDGAR.—There are none so far as we know.

ROB.—You have no claim to the letter whatever.

STUART.—Gordon was killed on January 26th, 1885.

NANCY.—1. Pronounce as if spelt "Tarble dost." 2. "Fit on-ay."

FORGETFUL.—The Diamond Jubilee was celebrated on Tuesday, June 22nd, 1897.

KITT.—It is not libellous to apply for payment of the account on a postcard.

WORRIED.—Wash your hands with carbolic soap, using hot water; that will assist your purpose.

PERCY.—The word is properly pronounced as spelt; but "god" is now the more usual version.

A. B.—The climate is so unhealthy that the district has long been known as the white man's grave.

ANT.—Rub them with a damp cloth dipped in baking soda, then polish with a little piece of chamois skin.

DANIEL.—With the exception of Brazil, Spanish is the prevailing language in every country in South America.

S. V.—Washing out the mouth with carbolic wash, or rinsing it with salt and water will help to harden the gums.

MATER.—A boy of twelve may leave school if he has passed the standard fixed by the School Board of the district.

K. T.—The cutting of tonsils is an operation as innocent in its consequences nowadays as cutting the nails or the hair.

B. D.—All information is obtainable, gratis, from Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W.

CHARLIE.—Your present position or your future prospects are not such as will warrant your entering the matrimonial state.

A LOVER OF THE READER.—This is one of the stains that is almost impossible to remove. You might try benzine collas with some success.

FRANK.—We never enter into religious disputations; we therefore must decline replying to, or commenting upon, the questions you have submitted to us.

V. W.—You have only to enter the Wills Office, give the name of the testator, the year of his death, and on payment of a shilling you will be shown the will.

B. O.—It may be made as good as new by scrubbing it not with soap, using a nail brush to reach the interstices, then polishing with a chamois or drying in saw-dust.

GERALDINE.—You will find the addresses of the nobility in "Debrett's Peerage," "Whittaker's Titled Persons," or "Who's Who," at the public reference library.

CICIL.—The conditions upon which you can be enrolled in the Cape Mounted Police must be ascertained from the Crown Agents for Colonies, Downing-street, London, S.W.

BACKE.—The best way is the practical way. Go into a shop and learn the business. Having done this, you are familiar with it in all its details, and are master of your profession.

DISTRESSED.—Take plenty of exercise, bathe daily, eat heartily, sleep at least eight hours, and do not do anything to abuse nature, and you will soon be rid of these black apopleks.

TROUBLED ONE.—We cannot think why you should be ashamed of having a healthy, rosy colour. That is just what so many are anxious to obtain, and so we advise you not to interfere with nature.

VERE.—Education is rather a vague phrase. We should require to have your explanation of what is meant by it when used by you before venturing to say which nation in Europe may be considered the best educated.

ANYAR.—The Ladrones Islands, discovered by Magellan in 1521, and so named by him because of the thievish propensities of the natives, were renamed Marianne Islands by the Jesuits, in 1607, in honour of Queen Marianne of Spain. The islands number twenty.

FUEKLED.—You are both old enough to know your minds, and you are too old to be dallying in love; you should at least know what you are going to do, and you have only a very few years more in which to make a match, or time will lay you on the shelf.

REGULAR READER.—Get a tablespoonful of liquid ammonia, a pinch of saltpetre, and a scrap of fine white soap; add to this two breakfast cups water; shake till it is dissolved and quite mixed; sponge the place with this, sponge off with clean cold water.

MOSTY.—Glebe lands are those portions of land belonging to a parish church over and above the tithes. If there be both a rector and a vicar, the glebe lands in the occupation of either does not pay tithes, though if in the occupation of a tenant it does.

REBELIOUS IDA.—There is no reason why a young woman of twenty should not go about at any reasonable time or to any respectable place with gentlemen whom she has known all her life. At the same time, the wishes of your parents should be respected.

MILLY.—Flowers may be preserved by being pressed between sheets of blotting paper, which is the common way, or they may be dipped into a clear solution of gum arabic, which quickly dries, and while retaining the colours of the flowers give them crisp, shell-like, formation.

LAWRENCE.—Gibraltar was taken by the English in 1704, during the war of the Spanish succession, a war which was provoked by the aggressive policy of France in endeavouring to place a monarch of the French family upon the Spanish throne, and thus consolidate the two kingdoms into one.

IN NEED OF ADVICE.—Cannot you go away from the place where you now live? It is hard indeed to leave home and family to avoid persecution, but sometimes there is no alternative. If you cannot do this, try and avoid your enemy as much as possible, and remember that no gentleman would offer an insult to a defenceless woman.

A. P.—Use warm water with a little ammonia in it. Wash by rubbing between the fingers, but do not wring the chamois. Press it between the palms of the hands to take out the water, and hang before the fire or in the hot sun to dry quickly, rubbing and pulling the article into y per shape every few moments to prevent the skin's drying hard and stiff.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—Put half-pound of logwood in sufficient boiling water to cover it, let stand for twenty-four hours, strain, and apply to the board once or twice, boiling hot; then dissolve quarter-pound copperas also in boiling water, and go over with that once or twice, till requisite blackness is secured; when dry and before using the board rub it well with dry straw, which makes it smooth and slightly glossy.

THE WOMEN WHO WAIT.

He went to the war in the morning,
The roll of the drum could be heard,
But he paused at the gate with his mother,
For a kiss and a comforting word.
He was full of the dreams and ambitions
That youth is so ready to weave,
And proud of the clank of his sabre,
And the chevrons of gold on his sleeve.

He came from the war in the evening,
The meadows were sprinkled with snow,
The drums and the bugles were silent,
And the steps of the soldiers were slow.
He was wrapped in the flag of his country
When they laid him away in the mould,
With the glittering stars of a captain
Replacing the chevrons of gold.

With the heroes who sleep on the hillside
He lies with a flag at his head,
But blind with the years of his weeping,
His mother yet mourns for her dead.
The soldiers who fall in the battle
May feel but a moment of pain,
But the women who wait in the homesteads
Must dwell with the ghosts of the slain.

F. M.—Dollar is a word that has passed through various forms. It was thal, thaler, daler, daler, daler and taller. It originally came from Thal, a town in Bohemia. Here coins of an ounce in weight were made. They were called Joachim's thaler or Schlick's thaler. So popular did these coins become that they gave their name to those that came after them. Their manufacture dates from about the year 1518.

AGGIE.—The cause of your blushing when in company is simple; you have not yet become familiar with the forms and manners of society. After a short intercourse with the world, bashfulness will soon be got rid of; at all events, in those times it is rather an uncommon feature. Blushing suddenly red after meals without any apparent cause is most probably occasioned by indigestion.

LEE LEIGH.—Gibraltar has been in possession of the British continuously for nearly two hundred years, since 1704, when it was captured by a combined British and Dutch force; it has in British hands, however, been repeatedly besieged by both Spaniards and French, the most memorable siege lasting from June, 1779, until September 1781, the attacking force numbering 40,000, while the defenders were only 7,000.

CITY OF ROME.—Wages earned on North Atlantic steamers at present are—Boatmen, £4 per month; firemen, £4 per month; trimmers, £3 per month; an advance upon these figures has lately been conceded to crew of steamship City of Rome, where firemen get £4 10s. per month, and trimmers £3 5s.; seamen get the usual rate of £4; on steamers engaged in Southern trade seamen get £3 15s.; firemen, £4; and trimmers, £3 per month.

A TORY.—Amongst the different duties of the Speaker to the House of Commons are, to read to the Sovereign petitions or addresses from the Commons, and to deliver in the Royal presence, whether at the Palace or the House of Lords, such speeches as are usually made on behalf of the Commons; to manage, in the name of the House, when counsel, witnesses, or prisoners are at the Bar; to reprimand persons who have incurred the displeasure of the House; to entertain the members at dinner, in due succession, and at stated periods; to adjourn the House at four o'clock, if forty members be not present; to appoint tellers on divisions. The Speaker must abstain from debating unless in Committee of the whole House.

ANAD.—Make a brine of salt and water, put in the cucumbers, and let them remain nine days, pouring off the brine and adding it every second day. On the ninth day take some cider vinegar, make it boiling hot, and pour over the pickles, having first covered them with grapevine leaves. Then sweeten some elder-vinegar with two pounds of sugar to the gallon of vinegar. Have ready the cinnamon, cloves, mace, allspice and peppers, and put into the vinegar; white heating, turn off the first vinegar, and then pour this over them. Exclude them from the air.

ORIGINEE READER.—Put a few drops of glycerine (about six) into half a teacupful of cold water; take a muslin rag and wring tightly out of this water; then rub lightly over the collar or shirt front; apply a good hot polishing iron and finish; turpentine may be used in the same way, a few drops added to the damping water instead of the glycerine; another way, also a very good one, is to rub a damper (which has been tightly squeezed out of cold water) over a piece of pure white soap, and apply it lightly to the article to be glazed; if the article is polished on a hard board a higher polish may be attained.

CAREFUL HOUSEWIFE.—Take out of doors and shake well, but carefully. Much dust will, in this manner, have been disposed of. Brush them carefully then with a clean soft clothes brush. Have frons moderately hot, and prepare a dish of warm water with a teaspoonful of starch to the pint of water. With a clean white cloth or sponge dampen over and carefully sponge a width of the curtain corresponding to width of ironing board, after which it is to be well dried and pressed with the hot frons. The curtain should be pressed upon the wrong side, and when it has all been carefully gone over, if the curtains be folded down the centre as when new, and pressed, leaving a fold, no one would think the curtains were not new.

J. L.—Take a plate and pour some boiling water on it, then place the stain on the plate in the water; take a little oxalic acid and sprinkle it over the stain, and leave it for awhile, then pour boiling water on it and it will disappear; some of the new blue-coloredinks are of a different nature, and may not come out with that; though we think it will; however, in case, you will certainly remove it with a little chloride of lime, but first try the acid; to use the chloride of lime get one pennyworth, and put it in a dish with two breakfast cups of water; stir it up with a stick, and stir again, leaving it for an hour or more, then pour it through a piece of fine muslin, and put into a bottle for use; it takes out stains of tea, coffee, fruit, &c., and is used in the same way as the oxalic acid, pouring a little on the top of the stain.

MATV.—Sugar added to your jelly will never make it firm, it will only make syrup. There is a substance in all fruit called pectine which is a vegetable gelatine, and it is that in all fruit that makes it jelly; if the fruit is not ripe then it will not jelly, or if you have too much water in it, or if you have gathered your fruit after rain the fruit is so soft that the water goes into it; now, you know, if you boil sugar and water you get syrup, but no jelly; always consider your fruit, if it is ripe and dry very little will make it jelly; long boiling only helps because it boils away the water; now, gooseberries, black and red currants, apples, and some plums have a great deal of pectine; strawberries and raspberries less; if this you have made is really not fit to use, we would advise you to add to it some fresh fruit or juice of some kind that will jelly easily, and boil a few minutes.

PHILIP X.—The day is long past when lovers felt themselves free to try to compel love, and in this enlightened age surely no man wants to marry a woman who does not love him. Happiness is never found in such unions. And pray do not be guilty of such a fatal error as to think that you can teach a woman to love you. That is the theory of the egotist and has wrecked many a life. The only way in which one may be taught to love is to first of all inspire respect. Then after a time a quiet, steady, trustful and enduring love may grow up in the heart—a love that eternity itself cannot uproot, neither can the storms of adversity cause it to waver. As long as its object continues worthy, just so long will such love triumph over all theills and cares of life. As far as your own immediate one goes, your best course is so to conduct yourself that the lady can do nothing but look upon you with confidence and respect. When you have inspired this feeling in her mind you can afford to wait in the hope that more tender thoughts may take root there and finally bud and blossom into affection.

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